

PAROCHIAL
DISCOURSES,

ADDRESSED

TO A CONGREGATION,

IN

THE COUNTRY.

BY

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London:

PRINTED IN THE YEAR M.DCC.XCVI.



IT will be perceived, at the first glance, that these Sermons were occasional, the Subjects being taken, principally, from the portions of Scripture appointed for the Days on which they were preached.

Nothing of learning will be found in them; the Author having only attempted to engage the attention of his Audience by arguments adapted to plain understandings, shortly summed up, and, as he trusts, clearly expressed; which, with due deference to the opinion of others, is presumed to be a more effectual manner of instruction, than by critical and elaborate disquisitions.

ERRATA.

- Page 161, Line 15, for *brought*, read *tangt*.
165, — 17, dele *and*.
168, — 18, dele *and*.
174, — 5, for *utter*, read *expres*.
176, — 21, insert *is*, before *indeed*.
185, — 16, for *infinity*, read *infinite*.
186, — 11, for *sacrifices*, read *counsel*.
190, — 31, after *be*, insert *be*.
212, — 15, for *shut*, read *theſe*.
— 16, for *theſe*, read *ſhut*.
217, — 21, for *bat*, read *that*.

DISCOURSE I.

MATTHEW, Chap. IV. Ver. 1.

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the Wilderness, to be tempted of the Devil. And when he had fasted forty Days and forty Nights, he was afterwards an hungred. And the Tempter came unto him.

THE history of our Saviour's fasting and temptation is delivered down to us at large by St. Matthew and St. Luke, much to the same purpose, and is barely mentioned by St. Mark, who, however, according to the English translation, makes use of an expression different from the other Evangelists, saying, that our Lord was *driven* of the spirit into the wilderness, whereas they only inform us, that he was *led*; upon which it is necessary to remark, that if the word used by St. Mark in the original, were taken in the strongest sense it is capable of, it might mislead an unlearned reader,

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and induce an objection, that our Lord underwent this trial unwillingly, which would not only be absurd, but impious, to affirm, and is not warranted by any the least intimation in the holy scriptures. The whole transaction was under the influence of the spirit, and intended as an additional argument to certify the Jews of Christ's being the Messiah, and probably to serve as an example to his followers, for the purpose of assuring and strengthening them, in the contests they in their turns were to enter into with the same ghostly enemy, whose delusions are here described.

It is proper to remind you, that the great proof of our Lord's being *he that should come*, depends on the prophecies being compleated in his person ; and among those, there is a remarkable one of Moses, in the 18th of Deuteronomy—“ The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, ~~of~~ thy brethren, *like unto me* ; unto him shall ye hearken.” Which passage is referred to by St. John, and (twice in the Acts of the Apostles) by St. Peter and St. Stephen. Now, among many other circumstances, in which this likeness of our Saviour to Moses was apparent, this of forty days and nights abstinence was a distinguished particular. Moses was forty

forty days and nights in the mount, by the command of God, Jesuſ was forty days and nights in the wilderness, by the impulse of the holy ſpirit, both of them without communication with hu- man beings; a peculiarity in point of ſimilitude, which would be more likely to convince the Jews, an obſtinate and bigotted nation, than arguments, or even miracles. For we may obſerve, that Moſes and the law are always in their mouths, and that our Saviour, in order to conciliate their minds to his perſon and precepts, conformed, in the moſt ſcrupulous manner, to the rites and ceremonies ordained by that great law-giver. But there is another strong circumſtance of likeneſſ which accompanied the fastings of Moſes and Jesuſ, viz. that both of them, imme- diately after this discipline was ended, and not before it, began, on their return to their people, to deliver their doctrines; Moſes the law and his ordinances, and our Sa- viour his gospel. This, then, is one fair and admissible account of the fact we are treating of; but there is also yet another, which is, that as it pleased God to prove his righteous fervant by tem- ptation, this retirement from all ſocial in- tercourse, and the mortification of his body, might strengthen the faculties of

the soul, might fix the mind solely in the contemplation of heavenly things, and support that duty, love, admiration of, and resignation to, the divine will, which are the genuine effects of purity and virtue ; preparing him, by that means, for the attacks he was to sustain.

Who, or of what nature of beings, the adversary or false accuser is, as the word Διάβολος or devil, should be translated, holy writ hath not historically or at large informed us, and no other oracle can : yet we know and feel that there is a secret enemy who suggests all evil to us, who corrupts our hearts and deludes our understandings, who constantly counteracts all godly affections within us, and, by imperceptible arts, draws us off from the service of God, to the bewitching and ruinous enjoyments which this world offers and bestows ; but that this enemy was ever seen by mortal eyes, is universally and reasonably denied.

Our Saviour's temptation, some learned men conjecture, was in a vision. A clear notion of what that is, St. Peter gives us in the Acts, where all the faculties operate, in respect to the objects represented to the senses, in the very same manner as if those objects were subject to the touch, or really and substantially did exist, in form and figure, as they are presented

presented to the imagination. Under this idea, the character of our Saviour is still supported. The Lamb of God appears without sin, not only of word or deed, but even of thought also. What is proposed by this supposition, is, to deliver us from a difficulty which occurs to some (taking the temptation for a reality) how our Saviour should be unaware, as it may seem, of the manner of person who tempted him, or should be so much in his power; which, it is argued, was inconsistent with the fulness of knowledge he was endued with by God, contradicts the divine attribute he possessed, of intuitively discovering the secrets of all hearts, and derogates from that authority over evil spirits, which in many instances was manifested by him, since, in the history before us, he appears to have been transported by Satan where he would.

But, perhaps, an answer to the objection is not difficult. First, the temptation was designed or permitted by God, for the setting forth of his glory—he was led to it by the holy spirit. Secondly, had he been previously warned of what was coming upon him, or had he not been purposefully left unsupported of all supernatural assistance, there could have been no temptation at all, no probation of his faithfulness,

ness, for he would at once have repulsed the adversary, with the same indignation as he did finally put him to flight. And thirdly, the very circumstance of his being carried and placed by the Devil on a pinnacle of the temple, shews only more strongly the excess in which God suffered his Holy One to be subject, for a season, to the Prince of the Power of the Air; an act which, as to Satan himself, is not more extraordinary than that of his transforming himself into an angel of light. But, fourthly, the best presumptive evidence (as I conceive) of the reality of Christ's temptation, however the history of it may seem marvellous, is this, that as the second Adam, according to St. Paul's expression, was promised, prefigured, and prophesied of, from the beginning, to redeem, by his obedience and righteousness, that which was lost by the sin and disobedience of the first Adam, so is it rationally conformable to the tenor of God's dispensations, that he should be tempted, as were our first parents, by the *same* enemy to mankind, and by the *same* arts and treacherous arguments, as they were tempted, to rebel against the express commandment of God. In the last case, as in the first, the seduction is carried on by a false gloss upon the divine ordinances,

nances, and by the promise of advantages consequent upon the breach of them.

Having thus, as I trust, cleared the ground, we are to consider our Lord's temptation in detail. The first attack made upon him seems founded in the expectation, that an exhausted and infirm state of the body, as our Saviour's must have been, after so long and rigid a fast, would naturally, and according to the common propensity of human nature, (which is ever ready to accept the first relief which offers, or indeed any relief, on any terms, in cases of extremity) incline him to the expedient proposed ; aided as it was by an implied insinuation, that if he did not deliver himself by such means as *must* be in his power, *if he were* the Son of God, he would be considered as an impostor. We cannot imagine any inducements which could operate upon a person in our Lord's situation more forcibly, than those which the tempter here made use of : The pressing call of nature, which often breaks through the strongest fences of religion and morality ; and the imputation of falsehood and deceit, than which nothing can be more grievous to a good mind ; by which it is not uncommonly provoked to an unadvised and prejudicial defence, or to the production of more than ordinary evi-

dence, to countervail the accusation. And we may affirm, that no other inhabitant of the earth besides Christ himself, could have escaped this treachery, and have thus retorted the injury on the assailant. " If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." This was, indeed, the very same mode of repulse which our Lord constantly opposed to the insidious attacks of the Pharisees, whom, in more than one place, he stiles the children of the Devil; not condescending directly to reply to their questions, but reproving the folly and weakness of their attempts on his virtue and understanding. In the instance before us, he in like manner seems to intimate to the tempter, that it was a vain expectation to seduce him to any exercise of his miraculous powers, for the paltry purpose of quieting the importunity of a carnal appetite; that the food of his existence was spiritual; that the situation he was in was from God, and that he should rely on him only for deliverance.

This snare being thus broken by the force of a scriptural application, - the Devil

vil makes the same scriptures a foundation for his next temptation, which may be paraphrased nearly after this manner. You depend upon the scriptures, therefore, if you are he whom they speak of, you will doubtless give proof of their relation to you, and of your faith in that word of God, by which, you say, man shall live, by casting yourself down from this height—" For it is *written*, that he shall give his angels charge over thee (if thou art the Christ) and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." The dilemma to which it was meant to reduce Jesuſ, was this ; either that he must shew, by ſome manifest ſign, that he assumed those words to himſelf, or, by declining ſuch proof, ſhould not only in a manner contradict the testimony he had just borne to the scriptures, but deny his own character alſo, and betray a ſort of diſſidence in the power or protection of the Almighty. Had he acted as, perhaps, a *mere* vain man would have behaved, it could have effected no good purpose of his miſſion ; nay, it would have been a triumph to the grand deceiver—Behold, thou moſt High ! thine own Son, in whom thou art well pleased, *he* maketh experiment of thy omnipo-tence, and of thy truth, to ſatisfy *me*, the outcast

outcast of Heaven, thy inveterate adversary, and of all thy creation !

Nothing could more strongly set forth the humility and faith of our Saviour, than the answer he makes to the enemy. “ Thou shalt not tempt (or try) the Lord thy God.” Which, we may observe, he introduces with these words—“ It is written again,” as much as to say, the voice of scripture is still against your wicked insinuations. You have made use of the language of what is written against the grand scope and meaning of holy writ, by perverting it, and your deception is discovered.

Thus disappointed and foiled, the last effort of the tempter is made desperately and fiercely. From the top of an high mountain he sheweth him all the kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them, and saith—“ All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” All the kingdoms of the world are at thy option ; at thine, who art hungry and thirsty, destitute, forlorn, and deserted by God and man, if thou wilt consent to hold them of *me*, and acknowledge thy dependence by those tokens of submission, usual from the vassal to his lord ; for the Greek word imports a bodily gesture of reverence. It might be prostration, as performed before

before a superior, in the ceremony of doing homage for an honour, as it is continued at this day ; but some form of this sort was intended by the expression, as we may collect from the disdainful reply to the proposal—“ Get thee hence ;” or, as St. Luke has it—“ Get thee behind me, Satan ; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *him only* shalt thou serve.” Which word “ serve ” signifies actual practical obedience, as “ falling down and worshipping ” relates to the outward ceremonial and profession of submission. Our Saviour’s answer, you may observe, is abrupt and indignant, as if he had on a sudden discovered the kind of being who was addressing him, and was roused at his audacity and subtlety. Satan is immediately discomfited, and angels come and minister unto him. The form of the whole is that of a dramatic dialogue, with three changes of scene, in which a moral and religious doctrine is conveyed to us ; a representation not uncommon in the scriptures, as, in particular, is the Book of Job, which is also a drama and a temptation.

Before I proceed to draw inferences from this subject, I will offer a few words in addition to the observations already thrown out in this discourse, upon the literal

literal interpretation of this scripture. It is said, that all the operations of the Devil, his sudden appearance, his discourse with our Lord, his taking him and transporting him to the heights of the temple and the mountain, have so much the air of fable and romance in them, as to be unworthy of holy scripture ; and as this manner of temptation is singular, it cannot be taken as a reality, but should rather be considered as a legend, or one of those pious fictions invented of old to do honour to the new religion. But I would answer, that whatever the cavils of unbelievers may be, here we find it among the sacred records ; and that our religion is not a system of occular or mathematical demonstration, but of faith ; for which, among other arguments, we may adduce this, that the very book of these records, hath, by the visible providence of God, been preserved through so many ages of persecution and ignorance, and delivered down to us as our comfort and joy, and hope unto salvation. If every circumstance is to be rejected which does not appear exactly suited to what some call the natural course of things, we should lose the fundamentals of our belief. It must always be remembered, that our Lord's history was one train of supernatural events,

events, from the beginning to the end of it. His birth, his works, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, were either in themselves, or the appearances which accompanied them, beyond all common and ordinary observation. Why, then, should this transaction of the temptation be the subject of amazement or infidelity? Had it not been related by three Evangelists, had they differed in their account of it, had it been found wanting in some of the oldest manuscripts, or had there been any marks of fraudulent interpolation, such discovery would have furnished ground of objection; but, as there is nothing of this sort, we must receive it upon that authority which supports all revelation, viz. the word of the spirit; and we know that his record is true.

The moral here intended to be conveyed *generally*, is this; that in all our difficulties and distresses, when, perhaps, our own evil thoughts, or the advice of wicked counsellors, might prompt us to make use of *improper means* for our deliverance, we should rather submit to endure the affliction, and depend upon the goodness and providence of God. And however just we may be in our own eyes, however confident that God has accepted us, and that we are his peculiar

culiar care, that we should hold this blessed persuasion in humility ; that we should provoke no dangers, spiritual or bodily, or wish to call forth the interposition of God, beyond his ordinary dealings with mankind, either to prove his goodness and power, or to gratify our own pride and distinction, as his favourites. Above all, that neither the wealth or grandeur of the whole world itself, should seduce us from our allegiance to him ; that he alone should be our Lord, and that in him all our wishes and desires, all our ambition, all our affections, should repose. It may be inferred, also, from this story, what the Apostle means by these words, in which he plainly advert's to it—" Who being himself tempted, will with the temptation find a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it." This way to escape, is, by an immediate application to the holy scriptures ; they will answer our doubts, and comfort us in our afflictions ; they will teach us, that if we hold before us the shield of faith, we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

[This text is treated of according to the vulgar acceptation of the history. Dr. Farmer's Critical Exposition would be of little use to a common congregation.]

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END OF DISCOURSE I.

DISCOURSE II.

PSALM CXII. Ver. 1.

*Blessed is the Man that feareth the Lord ;
he hath great Delight in his Commandments.*

IN this, as in many other Psalms, an encouragement is given to piety and obedience to the divine will, by the promise of temporal blessings ; for the construction of the verse before us stands thus—He who fears the Lord will delight in making his law the rule of his conduct, and in reward of his faithful services, God will bestow upon him the good and valuable things of this world. This may be collected from the verses which follow the text—“ His seed shall be mighty upon earth : the generation of the faithful shall be blessed. Riches and plenteousness shall be in his house, and his righteousness endureth for ever.” And yet we often see those whom we esteem virtuous in a condition much below riches and plenty, and sometimes in

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the contrary extreme of poverty and want. Upon which apparent contradiction, we need only observe, that the rule, though generally true, is not so universally or without exception; or that those who in our eyes are just and meritorious, are, in truth, imperfect and undeserving in the sight of God, who feeth not as man feeth; or that Providence, foreseeing that his bounty would be injurious to the virtue of a righteous man, that it would be a snare and temptation to him, hath for the best purposes with-held it; or, finally, that he reserves the reward to another life, and tries the steadiness and perseverance in well doing of the faithful in this, by disappointments and troubles; which probation, perhaps, is the most signal mark of God's concern for us that we can experience. For the greater part, however, notwithstanding some instances which do occasionally occur to the contrary, we may accept it as a maxim, that every best man is most blessed. The fear of the Lord itself is a blessing; not that fear which views him as a severe judge and an avenger, for in this light he appears only to the wicked, but that affectionate reverence, which regards him as our parent, our protector, and our friend; which encourages us to look up to him in all our actions, which submits

submits every thought and design to his approbation, which prayeth earnestly for his grace to prevent or assist our desires, and walketh humbly in submission and resignation to his dispensations. When the heart of a man is thus sanctified, it is impossible but that the testimonies of the Lord should be his “ delight and his counsellors.” What tranquility of spirit, what satisfaction in the conscience, what comfort in every reflection, what courage under adversity, what confidence in hope, what joy in expectation, what pleasure in possession, does such a man ensure to himself ? So true it is, that “ they have great peace who love thy law.” Besides, the commandments of God, if we advert only to the positive letter of the two tables, do of themselves manifestly, and I might add, necessarily, tend to this point.

If we consider and believe that there is but *one God*, to him and his works our adoration and our praise is restrained. What an astonishing scene lies here before the imagination ! I see, I hear, I move, I think. Whence is this ? From the one God who made me. I eat, I drink, I live. It is the gift of the one God who created animals, and green herbs, and fruit, for my sustenance. I have health, and strength, and passions, producing pleasure. Still this is from

the one God who has so endowed my nature. If I feel grief or trouble, it is more my folly and sin than his desire. If I endure pain and sickness, it is his wisdom and kindness, to intimate thereby the perishable condition of my being, and to prepare me for the great change of mortality. It is the one God who doeth all this. Can I refuse to love, to fear, and to admire him? Whatever we delight in must be ultimately referred to him, for all is *from* him. There all our contemplations must rest at last, for they cannot rise higher, or be directed elsewhere. If we transfer our affections, our dependance, or our joys, to any other object, we are as much idolators as though we worshipped a graven image. It is in this sense only that the second commandment concerns us at this day. When we fix our hearts upon riches, when we use undue means to acquire them, when we value them in ourselves, or reverence them in others, do we not as literally fall down before the *golden image*, as if we had worshipped it in the plains of Babylon? If we consume our time and our estates, our health, too, and our reputation, in feasting, revelry, music, lasciviousness, drunkenness, know we not that we worship the gods of the heathen? that we sacrifice to those vices
which

which they deified, under the names of Momus, Apollo, Bacchus, Silenus, and Venus? that, as the Psalmist says, we delight in vain gods. And are we not certified of our wickedness, when the jealous one God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation; when the weaknesses, and the diseases, and the poverty of parents descend to posterity? Can any deduction be more striking than this?

Where, then, is the fear of the Lord? Where is the delight in his commandments? Where is the blessing that should attend them? This, also, is evident from the third commandment. Does *he* fear God, even in his wrath, who makes light of his holy name upon every trifling or impertinent occasion? Can *he* delight in his commandments who desperately breaks through a most positive prohibition at every sentence he utters? Does *he* expect a blessing who is continually calling down curses upon his own head, and who impiously desires God to damn him in his fenses or his limbs, nay, even in his soul? And does not this sad and deplorable depravity of heart arise principally, and often totally, from a neglect or a profanation of God's Sabbath, which he has commanded to be kept holy? Is it not to be attributed to an

habitual contempt or forgetfulness of God's ordinances, that men prefer idleness, or sleep, or bad company, and all kinds of debauchery, to his service? That they prefer the tavern to his house? It is obvious, that the *fear* of God must be so entirely absent, that there is not the least *thought* of him; for did men use their senses, they must, by the tenor of this commandment, turn back to the creation of the world, when God rested from his labours.

Now mark the progres of this consideration. The last or supreme work is *man* in God's *own image*. The other works of God, the light, the heat, the sea, the earth, and all that are therein, were made *for man*; and to shew the anxious solicitude, if I may say so, of the Almighty, that all his operations in favour of man might be compleat and perfect, he is represented as surveying his creation with a sort of curious complacency. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was *very good*; and the evening and the morning were the sixth day." When we remember God's *care* to make every thing good for us, nay, to make man himself good in his state of nature, to have *studied*, as it were, and *laboured* for our happiness, grateful reverence, grateful

grateful obedience, and pleasure in that obedience, seem to follow as of course ; and instead of *one day*, a good man would wish every hour, if possible, to be dedicated to the expression of his thankfulness. The blessing, in this case, is in the very act ; it is a state of blessedness independent of the world. He who rests from his labours on the seventh day, and with the full sense of God's bounty and protection in the six days that are passed, enters into his courts with prayer and thanksgiving ; who retires to his family, and with a devout and composed mind instructs them in God's law, and teaches them to meditate upon his goodness, must feel *more than human* delight, and renew his occupations with alacrity and vigour *more than human*. The favor of God is with him, and a well regulated heart preserves him from those errors and vices, which he who neither fears or has pleasure in the Lord most commonly falls into, and is destroyed by.

Neither is the fifth commandment of so little import in this respect, as at first sight may be imagined. For although God hath said only, honour thy father and mother, that thy days may be long in the land ; yet, the clear inference is also, honour thy Father which is in

Heaven, that thy eternal portion may be glorious. The promise of an earthly blessing to an earthly virtue, does easily refer and lead us to an eternal reward for our observance of a spiritual duty of the same nature. The same disposition is requisite in both cases. We must love and fear the object. We must have pleasure in the duty. We shall be blessed for the performance of it. The one is a temporal office, to be attended by a temporal reward ; the other is an holy and heavenly service, to receive an eternal recompence in a state of immortality.

I hope you have hitherto gone along with me in the observations I have made, the intention of which is, to shew those who read cursorily, and sometimes inattentively, the Psalms and the Commandments, that there is a weight and significance in them beyond what immediately meets the ear ; that the fear of God is the *first* principle ; that obedience, and delight in that obedience, is the *evidence* of religious fear ; and, that the *consequence* of such conduct is blessing. The contrary, also, is true, from the effect of a contrary principle, or from the total want of any principle. I need not, therefore, use arguments to prove that the murderer is within this latter description, and shall only remark to you, that

that it was the first crime against which God's vengeance was denounced ; that the same punishment was annexed to it as remains to this day ; and that (as particularly applicable to our present purpose) the very indictment in the courts of judicature charges the criminal with *not having the fear of God before his eyes*, and with being instigated by the Devil ; who, we may remember, brought sin and death into the world, by seducing the woman to transgress the *primary commandment* of God. It may be said, that the unnatural enormity of this crime is the strongest prohibition of it ; but every restraint of this sort, drawn only from the instincts or sensibilities of mankind, must fail, as in suicide, unless man is impressed with the conviction, that he received life from God, and hath, for that reason, no right to take it away. And the same train of argument will prevail as to all duties, and all offences against them. The divine will, the divine approbation of good, or the divine abhorrence of every evil act, must be the standard of decision upon every question of right or wrong. Thus, in *theft* ; he who has the full sense of God's *justice* in his breast, will abstain from this deed as from poison. He will not only obey the command, thou shalt not steal,

but will refrain from every slight circumstantial *injustice*. He will neither with-hold the wages of the labourer, or refuse payment of a *just* debt, or defraud by the false weight and measure, or impose upon ignorance by calling bad commodities good, or demand exorbitant prices for his wares or his work, or take advantages from superiority of knowledge or art. I say, the man who fears God, and takes delight in the contemplation of *his justice*, will be nice, and scrupulous, and self-denying, in all such transactions ; and those who are occupied in the trade and traffic of the world, would be wise to consider it, for every deviation from the rule, in its utmost extent, is *stealing*. It is apparent, that nothing but the fear of the one true God, and the sense of his justice, can be the guard over evil propensities of this kind ; for in the heathen system, one of the most civilized and learned nations had a law encouraging theft, as training up their youth in acuteness and dexterity. Nay, one of their fabulous gods was the patron of robbers, and a robber himself. The blessing which belongs to the man who thus fears God, and has pleasure in his command of universal justice, is the conscious satisfaction, and the

the credit of integrity, which is the highest ornament of the human character.

Concerning the crime of adultery, it is the notion of God's *purity* which is the foundation of the law. If we are not sensible that he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity—that we must be pure as he is pure, we cannot look up to him with reverence, and, of consequence, cannot have pleasure in a Being so adverse in his attributes to our corruptions. The *heart* must be clean, as well as the *hands*. Nay more, we are otherwise struck out positively from the grace of God. Know ye not, says the Apostle, that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost? Yet, surely, there is no case in which spiritual assistance is more wanted, than in our bodily temptations against the heat and violence of our own passions. To obtain this preventing grace, we must pray for it, and that earnestly. If we entertain false notions of God; or if we do not adore him in the attribute of perfection, without spot or blemish, we give a carnal latitude to our minds, inconsistent with his precepts; from which error, either of the understanding or the will, it comes to pass, that lasciviousness, incontinence, and the irregular commerce of the sexes, are thought venial sins, at which God,
who

who knoweth our imperfections, will connive. Yet he has declared, by his Apostle, that neither whoremongers, nor adulterers, nor unclean persons, shall enter into his kingdom. All these are put into the same class, and our Saviour advertises therefore to them all, when he says, that whosoever *looketh* upon a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery in his heart. It is impossible that the heart can be with God, and sensuality at the same time in our mind ; light and darkness are not more opposite. It is equally impossible that a man should be blessed who brings a pest and a curse upon society. *Heathens*, indeed, might be excused, whose supreme god, Jupiter, was an adulterer and seducer ; yet even he, as the poets say, perpetrated his iniquities under the form of a beast, as if such vices were unworthy of any thing in the figure of a man.

Again : God asserts himself to be the God of *truth*, when he forbids false witness against our neighbour. The command does not respect only oaths and judicial testimony, but any falsehoods which may be injurious. We allow that no man can fear God who swears falsely, because we appeal to him to witness our veracity, and, of course, to punish our untruth. But what if the same evil follow

low from a lye, without any solemnity, as if we had sworn it in a court? It should seem that the crime is the same, and deserves the same punishment. If, then, a man says he fears God, and rejoices in his law, because he never forswears himself, though he goeth about constantly with lyes to destroy, I pronounce, without reserve, that his pretensions are false, and that he is himself a lyar. Who is the father of lyes, but the Devil? and what has been the effect of all his lyes, but the perdition of mankind? Does not he hate God? Was he not a rebel and disobedient from the beginning? Will not his punishment be chains in everlasting darkness? Let his children consider this!

The time presseth me to conclude, or I could say more. Finally, then, he who coveteth not the things of another, must fear God and love his commandments; for the law is of great compass, and comprehends many other precepts. It excludes envy, malice, hatred, the lust of the eye, the pride of life. It restrains our passions, our wishes, our desires, even our thoughts. It confines men to their own sphere, and their own acquirements. And why is this, but to enlarge our affections towards God, to ennable our ambition, and carry it to Heaven.

Every

Every man has abilities to provide enough for himself, without violation of that which is his neighbour's ; for nature and religion rejoice in moderation. But when covetousness enters the heart, God and his law are expelled ; things sacred and profane are confounded, power becomes right, justice and virtue leave the earth, the appetites are our governors, the passions our counsellors. We then know why covetousness is called idolatry, when every one goeth after his own inventions, and worshippeth his own abominations. In this disorder, where there is neither fear of God or men ; when divine and human laws are equally borne down by licentious concupiscence ; we discover, finally, that if we are left to our own will, we are neither fitted to make ourselves or others happy ; that there is no dependance upon any human motive, to regulate the actions of men ; that the belief and apprehension of a Supreme Being, all-mighty, all-wise, and good, is necessary to the welfare of the world ; and, that the more we are attached to that great object, the less likely we are to do injury to ourselves or to our brethren.

26 MR 59

END OF DISCOURSE II.

DISCOURSE III.

LUKE, Chap. XIX. Ver. 45, 46, Part
of 47.

And he went into the Temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought, saying unto them, It is written, my House is the House of Prayer, but ye have made it a Den of Thieves. And he taught daily in the Temple.

WHEN the historical part of the Scriptures does not apply in strictness, and exactly to the customs and practices of our times, an opinion is sometimes hastily taken up, that we have little or no concern with it; or, when the case stated with its circumstances, neither does nor can probably occur among ourselves, that the relation is a mere matter of indifference to us.

Of this kind is the account of our Saviour's expelling buyers and sellers out of the temple; a profanation, which

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we suppose impossible in a Christian country. Such things, however, *have been*, even almost within our own memory, when the churches were converted to the vilest uses, when they became stables and stalls for beasts, and the receptacles of rebels, robbers, and murderers. I think, too, that we have of late narrowly escaped from a repetition of the same or similar enormities.

To treat things sacred with contempt or general disregard, is the most decisive mark of national degeneracy and corruption ; and we accordingly are informed by Josephus, that in the time of our Saviour, the Jews had fallen into an excessive dissolution of manners, and were infamous for every kind of vice and wickedness ; in particular, that they had become inordinately covetous. To which it was owing that the house of God was made a market-place, for the sale of doves, to be offered at the presentations of children, and a shop for contracts of usury, where money was exchanged for pledges. If the object were gain, they had no consideration *where* it should be carried on ; which therefore possibly St. Paul might allude to, when he called "covetousness, idolatry," as being the worship of Mammon in the temple of the true God ; or, as our

our Lord, citing the Prophet, expresses it—a conversion of the house of prayer into a den of thieves. We may in part also account for this presumptuous violation of the sanctuary, from the total change which the religious character of the Jews underwent, after the captivity in Babylon ; their devotion became then more ceremonious than real ; which, we observe, Christ frequently lays to the charge of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were scrupulous in their ablutions, fasts, attention to holy days, and the legal keeping of the sabbath, but inwardly were a generation of vipers ; aiming at the applause of the multitude by external sanctimoniousness, making long prayers for a pretence, and preserving all carnal ordinances, but neglecting the weightier matters of the law. Upon which ritual piety, which is the profession of all hypocrites, we may remark, generally, that whenever religion is imperfect, the places dedicated to religion will be despised and neglected ; or, the offices and services attached to it will be performed without meaning, as spiritless periodical ceremonials.

Referring, then, the authoritative act of our Lord, in cleansing the temple from impurities, to this cause, two special grounds of enquiry are proposed to us

us by that view of the parable : First, upon what account we are bound to respect the house of God ; and, secondly, in what manner we may most effectively shew our sense of that duty.

When God revealed his will to Moses, concerning the form in which he would be worshipped, it pleased him to give a visible sign of his presence, by the cloud which rested between the cherubim, over the mercy seat ; and at the dedication of the first temple, built by Solomon, we read, that the glory of the Lord filled the house, and fire from Heaven descended on the sacrifice. In the second temple, built by the permission of Cyrus and his successors, a supernatural signification of God's presence was wanting, as also the ark of the covenant, with all the memorials of their great deliverances by his mighty hand. But, then, into this last temple did the Son of God enter, by which honour conferred upon it was its glory restored ; and to us, at this day, though " we *see* not his tokens," he hath promised, that wherever his servants are gathered together in his name, there he is in the midst of them. We have, therefore, every rational motive to reverence his sanctuary that the ancient Israelites could boast of, and though we walk by faith, and not by sight, as the

the Apostle speaks, our minds should be filled with equal awe and regard towards that holy habitation.

We cannot easily, indeed, find language adequate to the full idea which such sentiments inspire. To be assured that in this building the Spirit of the One eternal, immortal, invisible, is present; that *he* whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, is at our right hand; that *we*, dust and ashes, frail and miserable, are suffered thus to communicate with the Divinity; can we furvey even the stones of that building wherein he hath declared that he will visit us, without emotions of love, and gratitude, and amazement? If the palaces of earthly kings are held sacred, from a deference to their dignity, what greater reverence do his courts demand of us, who is King of kings and Lord of lords? If the caves and sequestered retirements of holy men, by whose precepts and example mankind hath been reformed, are explored and preserved, with a solemn and serious meditation upon their deservings, with how much more careful solemnity should we venerate *Christ's* church, whose teaching, whose example, whose merits, are beyond all comparison or parallel? If the monuments of the mighty, the wise, and the good, dead

long since, and dissolved into the base element from whence they were taken, are still honoured by admiring posterity, with what superior honour shall the temple of the *living* God be adorned, whose wisdom, whose power, whose goodness, is infinite, who endureth for ever, from everlasting to everlasting ? Such thoughts must arise in our hearts, when we consider *where we are.*

But further, our Saviour, at the same time that he demands all honour to be paid to the house of God, evidently lays great stress upon the use and appropriation of it—“ My house shall be called the *house of prayer;*” not meaning to express himself exclusively, as though prayer could not be elsewhere addressed to God, but directing us to the promise which is made to those who are gathered together in his name, and signifying, that prayer thus offered is most acceptable to him ; upon which, the practice of assemblies for the purposes of devotion is grounded.

If, indeed, we were to contemplate a number of religious men, united in the act of prayer, merely as a spectacle, it forms one of the most striking and interesting pictures which can be beheld ; but when we heighten the scene by the powers of imagination, and introduce the

the Deity himself condescending to their weakness, and listening to their supplications, it exceeds all expression of the pen, or the pencil, to describe justly what the mind is sensible of. To see, the humility of repentance—the exultation of hope—the placidness of charity—the confidence of faith—the meekness of resignation—the ardour of love—the joy of thanksgiving—all the amiable qualities, virtues, and graces, which human nature can exhibit; to see, I say, all these united in one groupe of adoration to the Creator of the universe, must hallow and sanctify these walls, and raise up earth to Heaven. For the nature of prayer is such, that, like the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice, it must purify, it must consecrate where it is poured forth; and the lips which utter it must be holy, as the object of it is divine. A thing, therefore, though in itself at first indifferent, becomes a vessel of honour by its use; and we may apply that to the temple which was said to St. Peter in the vision—“ What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Besides, it is agreeable to the feelings and sensibilities of men, that they should reflect with pleasure upon those places where they have experienced delight, and respect those things from which they

have received benefits. Upon which principle, I appeal to every good man's conscience, whether he has ever elsewhere felt more unmixed gratification, or has derived from any other thing more solid advantages, than the house of prayer hath administered to him. It is there we meet God as our friend : What more sublime than that intercourse ? It is there we hearken to his word : What more glorious than his promises ?

Again, in those very scriptures which are there read and explained to us, we observe a spirit of affection for God's house, breathed forth by the Jews, which ought to provoke Christians to a religious jealousy. When David was under the deepest personal distresses, when his children rebelled against him, when his friends deserted him, and his enemies reviled him, without complaining of those calamities, he exclaims—" My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Psalm 84. And, in the same strain, he pours out his spirit in the 43d Psalm—" O send out thy light and thy truth ; let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacle ! Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my

my exceeding joy ; yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God !” Innumerable citations from the Old Testament might be produced to the like purpose, which concur to demonstrate that as long as the least particle of the love and fear of God remained among that people, they looked towards the places dedicated to his worship with the most ardent zeal and affection ; infomuch, that when Solomon’s temple was destroyed, the Prophet Daniel informs us, that they thought upon its very ruins with a sort of melancholy joy—“ Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.” Now, considering these testimonies, it seems an extraordinary effort of perverseness in any man, and much more so in a person of learning, to attempt, at this day, the overthrow of social worship, and, consequently, all respect to the houses of God set apart for his service ; abolishing, at one stroke, the sabbath day itself, and every other public commemoration of the special mercies vouchsafed unto us. For, certainly, if social worship be not a necessary part of religion, the inutility of any edifice adapted to, and particularly accommodated for, that service, is apparent.

But why, then, under the æra of the theocracy, do we read of the *tabernacle of the congregation*? Why did God command Solomon to build him a house to place his name there? Why are the solemn assemblies in that temple, and in the second, erected on its foundations, recorded with so much care by the sacred historians? If the devotions of the closet be as acceptable as the united prayers of the faithful in God's house, why did the first Christians, immediately upon the ceasing of persecution, consecrate buildings exclusively appropriated to his worship? And why did the Apostles so strongly insist upon the communion of the Saints, and give such positive directions to their converts, that they should not omit "assembling themselves together, as the manner of some was," if it had been of no importance where or in what manner their devotions were exercised? It is, indeed, said by an Apostle, that "God dwelleth not in temples made with hands," but then we must remember, that this language was used solely to convince the idolatrous Athenians, that he was *every where*; that all things were his; and that "he was not worshipped with mens hands, as though he needed any thing," which was the false notion of the heathens.

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If additional arguments were required in this controversy, we might produce the authority of Christ himself, precisely to the point in question. When he teaches his Disciples how to pray, the address opens in the *plural* number—“*Our Father which art in Heaven.*” The form being plainly calculated for a number of worshippers, and not merely for an individual; which design runs through the whole tenor of that composition. Moreover, as we may remark that it comprehends the love of our neighbour as well as the love of God, common and united prayer must probably have been the more especial object of our Lord’s instruction; because (if the conjecture be not too refined) I would suppose it his intention to impress more strongly upon our minds the duty of universal charity, by the personal view of many brethren present, and joined with ourselves, in a collective supplication *for all* to the Father of Mankind.

But there is still another observation to the purpose, which may be taken from the following words of Christ—“*He who confesses me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in Heaven.*” Now there are only two modes in which *public* confession of our faith can be made; the one is, in the church

church of Christ ; the other, at the bar of persecution ; and God forbid that this last trial should be the lot of any of us !

I now proceed to the second head proposed for our consideration ; viz. in what manner we may most efficiently shew our respect for the temple of God. And this, I think, is best manifested by our frequent attendance upon it, and a serious, decent deportment therein. In the ordinary courtesies of life, neglect is contempt, and perseverance in such neglect is an affront. Apply this reflection to God's sanctuary, and excuse yourselves how you can !

Again, enquire further. Have you nothing to desire of your heavenly Father ? Have you nothing to thank him for ? Can you provide your daily bread without him ? Can you be preserved from hour to hour, in all the changes and chances of mortality, amidst diseases and accidents, without his constant care of you ? Among equals, it may be wise to be independent, but on God we *must* depend ; and even to wish for independence of *him*, would be impiety. However, God's service is perfect freedom, and if any one prefer his repose, his business, or his pleasures, to it, we will cease importuning him to come in ; for

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an unwilling guest will not bring with him a disposition to admire and enjoy the “ beauty of holiness.”

Absence is an offence, but misconduct in the actual sight of God, is a sin. To enter into his courts with an air of pride or levity, is derision. To indulge indolent gestures, to have wandering eyes, is mockery of his worship. To repeat prayers without attention, is to offer “ the sacrifice of fools.” But truly to reverence God and his tabernacle, we must compose our minds into a fit temper for the spiritual office we engage in ; we must leave the world behind us when we go into his gates ; we must exclude all wandering thoughts and imaginations, and be, as it were, caught up into Heaven, and dead to the flesh. All the passions and wishes of men must be extinct for a season ; all plans of futurity, except those that concern the soul, must be laid aside, the farm and the merchandise must be cast out of our consideration, for we cannot at the same time serve God and Mammon ; nay, even the best affections of the heart, as to temporal affairs, must give way to the single contemplation of the place we are in, of the Lord of that mansion, and of the peculiar interests which call us into it. To give real glory to holy things, the “ Spirit of God must bear

bear witness with our spirit," whereby alone we are enabled to say, " Abba, Father!"

We observe in the text before us, that when our Saviour had purged the house of prayer of buyers and sellers (which may be applied, in a figurative sense, to all worldly appetites and pursuits) *then* " he taught daily in the temple." From whence we may infer, that even the Son of God would have persuaded in vain, had he not previously prepared the way by purification ; signifying, that all the faculties of the soul must be intent upon one sole object, for " he divideth not his honour with another." Hence it was, that David being importunate with God that he would listen to him, expresseth himself thus—" My heart is *fixed*, O God, my heart is *fixed*, I will sing and give praise with the best member that I have." It is not the eloquence of the tongue, or the lifting up of the eyes, or the spreading forth of the hands, but it is the *heart*, which serveth him in singleness and sincerity. Agreeable to which, our Lord cites the words of the Prophet to distinguish the true from the false worshipper—" This people draweth near unto me with their *lips*, but their *hearts* are far from me."

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You see, then, upon the whole, that there is a veneration which of right belongeth to the temple, because it is the house of God ; that it is *there*, principally and especially, that it pleases him to receive our prayers ; and that by our solemn respect to him therein, we give fear to whom fear is due, and honour to whom honour.

There is, doubtless, a difficulty in divesting ourselves of what sticks so close to us as the imbecility and corruption of our nature, of our very manhood, as I may say, in order to prepare us for a worthy attendance in his courts, so as to answer the end of our service. But, consider, that this discipline prepares us also for the ultimate view of the Almighty, in another world, into which we cannot enter with glory, but by cleansing ourselves from those pollutions which adhere to us in our present state of existence, and becoming “ pure as he is pure.”

26 MR 59

END OF DISCOURSE III.

DISCOURSE IV.

LUKE, Chap. VI. Ver. 37.

Judge not, that ye be not judged : Condemn not, that ye be not condemned.

THOSE who have lived long in the world, and have by experience obtained the most accurate knowledge of human nature, inform us, that in respect to the *real* merits of men, if strictly examined, there is not that difference, upon comparison, between one individual and another, which is *generally* imagined, either as to their virtues or their vices. If this opinion be well founded, we may suppose that the distinction stands in *appearances* only, and that what we suppose to proceed from *principle*, does truly arise from *prudence* and *caution*; and that if one looks better to the eye of mankind than his neighbour, it is because he has more *art*, more *wisdom*, or a greater *command* over his *external* demeanour.

This

This is not a flattering picture, but if it should turn out to be a likeness, what are we then to think of ourselves and others? From the instances which daily occur, in which first opinions are discovered by the result to be erroneous, an argument is raised against all confidence whatsoever, and an universal suspicion takes place, upon this plain maxim, that at bottom one man is as good as another, and the converse of it is of course maintained, that all men are equally vicious. The observer who holds this language, must be presumed to put his own character out of the question, for if the universal equality, or rather the universal corruption, which he contends for, be allowed, then must he himself be included in his own censure, and the right of deciding upon others be annulled. On the other side, if, with a certain air of carelessness and indifference, one were to pronounce, that all were reasonably virtuous and passably good, it is probable he would be mistaken. Thus we are involved in a difficulty, for as long as men *think*, they will judge in consequence of their reflections. The question is, how to form a *just* judgment, and if this shall not be found easy, it will at least, one should suppose, be no hard task to avoid a *severe* one.

There

There is a sort of persons in the world who act as if they esteemed it *a duty* to reprove in season and out of season, and conceived they were doing God service by such violence ; but to such enthusiasts I would observe, that religious reproof consists in admonition, and not in persecution, even for conscience sake. Others assume the office of censors from mere friendship, as they say ; from pure good will to the offender ; but the advice of friendship is surely for the hour of privacy alone ; it laments, in the closet, the infirmities or sins of our brother, but forbears to gall his feelings or expose his faults. A third sort, again, launch out against certain *particular* vices, because *they know* their malignity ; formerly, indeed, they were ensnared by the same themselves, but they have long since cast them off, and would therefore *kindly* warn others against their indulgence, claiming a sort of privilege, from their own fancied purity, to condemn the impurity of their neighbour. In this case, however, it may sometimes be doubted, whether their exemption from sin be not owing to the incapacity of finning ; whether, in fact, they have quitted the vice, or the vice hath left them.

We see, also, some who acknowledge they are not so good as they ought to be,

be, yet, without scruple or reserve, bring their acquaintance to the tribunal, because, truly, *their* wickedness is of a very different complexion from their own; they have not the *same* temptations, the *same* opportunities, or, as it may be interpreted, the same *right* with themselves, to commit sin. When we read in the Scriptures of the woman taken in adultery, and set before our Saviour, he said unto her accusers, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her." He did not even impliedly permit those who were not adulterers to execute the law upon her; but he seems to intimate to imperfect man, that he should, in consideration of his being liable to condemnation himself, abstain from severity upon his brother mortals, who are of like passions and frailties. Under this disqualification, who shall be a judge or a censor? Strip the handsomest of human beings of his apparel, shall there be discovered no spot, no blemish, no deformity? If no one, so uncovered, is perfect, be assured that the inward man, if it could be seen, would not appear more amiable. We know ourselves as little as we do others. We entertain groundless notions of both, and are supported by self-complacency and vanity, which sometimes degenerate into

into envy, and sometimes into malice, and then what was at first a folly, concludes in a crime.

Thus far in respect to common sense and *moral* justice; but, besides these, there are reasons of prudence, and I might say, worldly wisdom, which should restrain the rash decisions of fallible men, concerning each other. As we know that scarcely *one* liveth who is absolutely invulnerable, it must be expected, that he who sets himself up to take cognizance of the vices of others, will in his turn be assaulted by *them*. He whose hand is against every man, every man's hand will be against him, and a kind of warfare will be perpetuated, destructive of the amities of society, if not of all social union itself.

The words of the text, understood in this sense, are a lesson of wisdom, for the government of the world in peace and harmony. For the public enemy, who walketh with a drawn sword in his hand, is not more an object of terror or hatred, than he who is a common satirist or a cynical observer upon mankind. Every one will repulse, with at least equal animosity, the invader of his life or property, and the adversary of his credit. Such a man, as the least penalty for his invidious sharp-sightedness, will be driven

ven like an infectious beast from the herd, and will meet with neither friendship nor pity in any calamities which may befall him. We are all of us, in general, so much awake to our own concerns, that it seems somewhat extraordinary, the consequences of a censorious, arbitrary disposition, which loves decanting without mercy upon the morals or practices of others, should not sometimes occur to us. In the first place, suppose this self-created magistrate unknown, it is immediately every one's business to find him out. Who is this? What is he? At last, most likely, it is discovered that he is no good man himself, and then, irritated by his offensiveness, it seems the common interest to hunt him down. Now of this, as the usual course of things, no one is ignorant; and yet, surely, to judge and to condemn is the too common foible (to call it by no worse name) in every company, and every situation of life. It is therefore, I say, extraordinary, that men should shoot at others, when the dart will so very probably rebound against themselves. It must be accounted for by a powerful motive, such as vanity, pride, envy, hatred, uncharitableness; all of them strong enough to excite the passions to any wickedness, and so very base and

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detestable in their nature, that nothing but evil can flow from so polluted a fountain.

The vain man is he who beholdeth his own merits in a glass, and straitway, as the Apostle says, forgetteth what manner of man he is. To the proud man, the Scripture speaketh—"Be not high-minded, but fear." To the envious man, David saith, that he fitteth lurking in the thievish corners of the street, that he may ravish the poor; that is, that he may oppress the weak and unwary. In regard to the cruel and uncharitable, the Gospel is very pointed, and at the same time full of tenderness. Blessed are the *merciful*, for they shall obtain mercy. As much as to say, there is not one man who standeth not in need of God's love and forgiveness. How, then, can he expect to receive other measure than that which he gives.

If, therefore, in the face of all the authority, and all the counsels of wisdom, human and divine, there still prevails the inveterate evil of rash and unkind judgment upon our neighbours, even at a great hazard to ourselves, I can compare this blindness to that of certain beasts only, which shut their eyes when they push at their adversary.

There

There is still, however, another cause, which sometimes operates strongly in respect to this passion of men, and that is, cunning. A person is conscious to himself that he is of ill fame, he therefore attacks all the world, prys into every one's secrets, and uses every means to discover the weakness or vices of others, that he may bring them down to his own level, and escape in the crowd. The great misfortune attending this practice is, that for the most part it is directed against the best members of the community, and by discovering even their imperfections, degrades virtue itself, and makes it unlovely and suspected in the eyes of the world; for as to the artful man himself, he is no better than the hunted animal, who, sensible of his danger, passes through the dirtiest and most noisome kennels, that he may conceal his own scent in that of other odours.

Having thus shewn that the crime spoken against in the text is opposite to moral justice, and even worldly prudence and policy, it will be enquired, whether we mean entirely to give the rein to vice and wickedness, and permit them to pass current in the world, without check or animadversion. By no means. This, however, I would say, that the censure or judgment to be passed

sed is not of *private* or *individual right*; that in all civilized nations, the legislature has been so jealous of the impropriety of things being thus left at large and to discretion, that when any have judged openly, and condemned others, though persons, perhaps, of dubious character, the law hath punished them as libellers; and in order that *real* crimes may be noticed, they have appointed public judges, impartial men, by national authority, for that purpose; so that there is no pretence for the censorship of unauthorised private men, from a failure of justice.

But, without doubt, the most weighty argument against this crime may be deduced from an accurate consideration of the words of our Saviour in the text—
“ Judge not, that ye be not judged.”
Remember, that there is a great and terrible day for you *all*, when the secrets of *all* hearts shall be disclosed, when every thing that is now hidden shall be made manifest, and you shall, every one of you, be seen in your *real* shape and character; not as you *now* seem or think yourselves to be, or as others *appear*, and you esteem of them. What will then be your excuse, against the express letter of Christ’s law, which you have broken? Do you, at *this* day, presume
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to know the reasons of every action or speech that you condemn ? And what if, at the day of judgment, that should be found just and reasonable, which you have passed sentence upon ? What if the person who is called an hypocrite shall be received into glory, as a sincere and devout servant of his Master ? What if he who was counted charitable upon earth shall be turned into hell as an impostor, as having served his ostentatious worldly purposes, with religion for his stalking horse ? Thus we are incapable of making a perfectly just estimate of others ; why, then, should we presume to decide ? We, in fact, are unable to find out our own true motives, and are most probably mistaken when we imagine ourselves free from partialities or antipathies. There is but one perfect Omnipotent Being in the whole space of existence ; this Being, therefore, is alone qualified to pronounce the righteous judgment.

But because we commit all justice to *him*, it does not follow that we are to approve wickedness and vice, or that we are in any respect to look upon them with indifference. In the first place, however, it will be wise to look at home —Physician, cure thyself, is a proverb that will apply universally. Secondly,

as Christians, our sole busines is to recommend godliness and virtue by a good example, and to pray unto God that he will restrain, by his grace and power, the overflowings of wickedness. Offences will probably abound, even in despight of the Spirit of God, and it will be well for *us* if *we* have washed our hands in innocency. We shall see many causes of disgust, many things to reprove, and much to occasion grief, in our passage through the world, but we must refrain from *judgment*.

When the faults, or vices, or even crimes of others, meet us in the way, so that we *must* look at them, let the humble and pious Christian abstain from censorious severity ; he should rather strike upon his breast, and say, “ Lord be merciful unto me, also, a sinner ! ”

END OF DISCOURSE IV.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE V.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. XI. Ver. 5.

The Poor have the Gospel preached to them.

THESE words refer to a prophecy, 61st chap. of Isaiah, ver. 1. recited in the 4th chap. of St. Luke, ver. 18. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me *to preach the gospel to the poor*; he hath *sent* me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised;” or, as the Prophet has it, “those that are bound.” Now this prediction our Saviour took expressly to himself, by declaring publicly in the Synagogue, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” And thus when John the Baptist sent his disciples to enquire, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” instead of a direct answer, he says, “Go and tell John what ye hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame

lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and *the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" The deeds, therefore, of our Lord corresponding so precisely with the language of Isaiah, concerning the Messiah, there could be no doubt but that *he* was the very person whose coming was so eagerly expected.

Hence it occurs to our observation, first, that the belief in Christ does not entirely depend upon miracles, taken *in general*, for though they would go so far as to certify, that "no one could do such acts unless God were with him," yet would they not prove that he who performed them were *sent from God*, much less would they prove that such author of miracles *were the Christ*; for many others, both before and after his time, did shew forth signs and wonders. But, secondly, to convince mankind that he was really the promised Saviour, not only miracles were necessary, but those *very* miracles which the Prophets foretold should be done by Christ *alone*, must be performed by *him*; that from the agreement of the *word* of God with the *power* of God, *strictly* and *literally* compleated, the person might without question be identified. Upon this ground it was that our Lord said of the unbelieving

ing Jews, “ If I had not done among them the works which *none other* man did, they had not had sin, but now they have *no* cloak for their sin.”

And this testimony thus given to Christ, St. Peter, in his Second Epistle, esteems so decisive, that he prefers its authority even to that of the voice from Heaven, though he had been an ear witness of it himself; for these are his words, “ And this voice which came from Heaven we heard when we were with him in the Holy Mount. We have also *a more sure word of prophecy*, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.” Relying, therefore, on this infallible direction, we must not pass over any incidents or particulars of our Saviour’s life and practice as indifferent to the grounds of our faith in him; for there were many other things besides those which he performed as signal evidences of his mission, that were circumstantially spoken of afore by the Prophets, as the *marks* or *characteristics* of the Messiah, and which on that account bear witness to him. Among those, was *preaching the gospel to the poor*, which, as I stated at the beginning, he did himself declare to John’s disciples, to be one undeniable proof by which their master should know him.

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At first sight, it seems extraordinary that so simple and so ordinary an action should have so much consequence, as to point out the Christ ; for the Jews had doctors and teachers of the law, whose office it was to read and explain the Scriptures, and as the multitude, in all nations, are the poor and the ignorant, they must have been, as we might suppose, the first objects of their instruction. But the *fact* was otherwise ; for the Jewish lawyers would not communicate their knowledge to any, except those who could purchase their assistance at an high price ; and as to the poor, they held them in the lowest contempt. Nay, it was a proverbial expression among them, equally absurd and vain, that the Spirit of God did not rest upon any but the rich. When our Lord, therefore, came into the world, he reversed this perverse system, for we find that he did not address himself to the rich and the mighty, but to the humble and destitute, as to those who had most need of his instruction, and were also most ready to receive it. “ For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”

This preference given by our Saviour to the meek and lowly, stands upon record in many parts of the gospel, and, as far as we can judge, was intended to draw

draw the eyes of all men upon the teacher, upon the novelty of his doctrine, and the new manner of making it known. On the one side, the Scribes and Pharisees, the chiefs and rulers, would be provoked to jealousy by this contempt of themselves, and the presumption of such an innovation; and on the other hand, those who had been thought unworthy of notice and information by their great and learned Rabbins, would be equally astonished and comforted by his teaching, and by being themselves specially addressed as the objects of it; and as it was the national custom, in all cases of extraordinary appearance, to refer to the book of the law, they would both of them consult that sacred oracle, and would there discover that this strange thing which they so much admired, was one of the attributes (if I may so speak) of the expected Saviour; that all that humility, which was so offensive to the rich, was the property and distinction of him, whom the Prophets had spoken of and described under that express character. The result, therefore, naturally would be, that when he asserted himself to be that very personage, and taught them "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes," they would be convinced by the strongest of all possible evidence,

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the exact concurrence of what was written with that which they heard and saw,

This method of proving Christ, by the prophecies, is the only certain foundation of our faith, and upon that account it has been suggested by unbelievers, that they were written *after* the event, and deceitfully accommodated to the circumstances of our Lord's life and sufferings. But this objection is futile, for the Jews themselves allow the authenticity of Isaiah, though they attempt to explain away his language ; and we know, also, that the stile in which the old Prophets wrote was lost long before the coming of Christ, and even to compose in the pure Hebrew tongue had ceased to be of common use and practice ; so that the imposition was either impracticable, or must have been speedily detected.

Thus far, then, the text, in one point of view, is disposed of ; but it still may be further enquired, why, and for what other purpose, the gospel was to be *preached to the poor*. The word gospel signifies glad tidings, and is used generally to give the assurance of salvation, through the atonement made by Christ on the cross, and the forgiveness of sins for his sake, through repentance. Now in this the rich and the poor would be *equally interested* ; they would both stand in

in need of a Saviour, and it would have been contrary to God's justice and truth, that the salvation which was promised to *all people* should at last be confined to one set of men only. There must have been, therefore, some blessing or peculiar benefit arising to the poor, which was to be derived from the gospel ; and this I take to have been the final retribution of rewards and punishments at the last day, when all the inequalities of this world shall be levelled, " when every valley shall be exalted, and every hill made low." The bringing life and immortality to light by the gospel, referred to the resurrection of the body ; but if the affairs of another state were to be on no other footing than those of the present, it would be hard to say that any *general* advantage would follow to mortal man ; for although the prosperity of some would be magnified by being eternal, yet the miseries of others would be enhanced by their being eternal also.

Our Saviour, addressing his followers, and in them all the Christian community, tells them, that in " the world they shall have tribulation, but that nevertheless they should be of good cheer, for that he had overcome the world." And, in another place, the Apostle informs us, that the " victory which overcometh the world

world is our faith ;" that is, a belief in the resurrection, with all its consequences; and of these, one principal consequence is, that there shall be no more rich or poor, high or low, neither shall there be any other happiness or misery, than as the reward or punishment of our actions in this life. The certainty of this future dispensation, is the best and strongest encouragement to the exercise of all Christian virtues, which are, the greatest part of them, more adapted to the humble conditions of life, than to the ranks of exaltation. Patience, temperance, meekness, charity, mutual forbearance, holy hope and confidence, though they must not be said exclusively to belong to the poor, are yet more commonly their grace and ornament, than of those who do not think them worth their cultivation; because, in the ordinary course of their good fortune, they are apparently, and according to their notions, of little use.

If we minutely consider the points of distinction between the various conditions of men, in their outward state, we shall discover more than will agreeably satisfy us concerning the worldly felicity of some, and the inconveniences, at least, if not the unhappiness, of others. The poor labours, and eats by the sweat of his

his brow : the rich sits down at his ease, and fattens on other men's toils : the poor is sick, and no man visits him ; he languishes under disease and pain, and relief is distant or precarious : but the sick rich man has all the medicines and art of the earth at his command ; his pain is assuaged by attention and assiduity, his pillow is smoothed, and his slumbers are watched. Is the one defended from the cold and the rain by a strong and compact habitation—the other shivers in his cottage at every blast, and finds no shelter under his roof of straw, from the pitiless pelting of the storm. Is the one respected, merely because he is opulent —the other is despised and cast out, for no other reason than because he is not so. Is not the rich called wise, or his person admired, because he is rich, and the poor ridiculed as a fool, or pointed at as a monster, for the offence of his poverty ? Nay, is not the first often credited as an honest man, and the second suspected as a cheat, upon no better grounds than the difference between their fortunes ? In fine, the rich man, in himself and all his connections, is the idol and delight of mankind ; the indigent and mean is the scorn or drudge of the world, and his wretched appendages are trod upon like the dung of the earth ; yet both of these beings

beings are human, both are the workmanship of the same God, and shall both die the same death. The difference is, that this life is not the same to both of them. To the one it is joy ; to the other, mortification and sorrow : and in such situations, what could comfort the afflicted, or reconcile him to endure existence, but the certainty of *another* life, of a reward and a recompence for all that he hath suffered in this ? What could support the mind of the poor and destitute, but the prospect of eternity ? The life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, hath done this. “ Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy !”

The heathens, who saw not this light, had a maxim, that the poor might with justice hate the Gods, because they had so little care of them ; they cursed their birth, and put an end to their being, because in life they had no satisfaction, and beyond the grave they had neither hopes nor fears. But the gospel was preached to inculcate an opposite doctrine. “ Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The gospel was given to justify the ways of God to man ; to explain all those strange inequalities which we observe

serve in the world ; to correct the pride of the mighty, and to uplift the despondency of the low ; to declare, that he who had his good things in this life, might be tormented in the next ; and that the beggar upon earth, might repose in the bosom of Abraham in Heaven.

The difference of ranks and degrees, the varieties of blessings, and the entire deprivation of them, are designed of God, for the purposes of society ; and many distinctions, which serve useful ends, are by his divine appointment, though irksome and obnoxious to men. Religion, however, is *equal* to *all*, there is no difference or distinction as to what regards the soul ; it is this which brings the glad tidings ; it is this which teaches us, that whatever be our earthly inheritance, we are joint heirs of salvation through Christ ; and though subject to the powers and principalities of the world, we are capable of a crown of glory in the kingdom of our heavenly Father. The design, therefore, of preaching the gospel to the poor, was to prove Christ to be the Messiah, according to the prophecies ; to shew the effect of that future immortality which he taught, and his resurrection assured to the world ; to comfort the humble, and to admonish

the fortunate and superior part of mankind. For all the conditions of men, prosperous as well as adverse, are probationary trials, or, as the Scripture calls them, temptations, by which the degree of every one's faith and piety is determined. It is not necessary that the man of abundance should be wicked, though he has the greatest opportunities, and, perhaps, the strongest allurements to vice; but he who wants almost every thing, will lay hold on Christ and religion, that he may not be totally destitute, and if this be no merit in the individual, it is at least the favour and grace of God.

However, upon the whole, there is one sense in which the text may be understood and applied to every state of man, and to every individual; and that is, a Christian must *become poor*, however outwardly rich, before he can participate of the blessings of the gospel. We are sinners, all of us; we have all need of mercy, and a Saviour; and to obtain this salvation, we must *humble* ourselves, and confess our unworthiness. All our pre-eminent, our possessions, our accomplishments, the applause of the many, and the approbation of the few, all pride and vanity, all esteem and respect for ourselves, however reasonable, must be cast aside, when we approach the throne of

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of Divine Majesty and Goodness. This is the spirit of righteousness, in which we ought to present ourselves in this place: We must become naked of worldly ornaments, that we may be cloathed with the wedding garment, and enter into the joy of our Lord,

END OF DISCOURSE V.

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DISCOURSE VI.

I. PETER, Chap. II. Ver. 24.

*Who his own self bare our Sins in his own
Body on the Tree, that we being dead to
Sin should live unto Righteousness ; by
whose Stripes ye were healed.*

WE live in an age which, on many accounts, is esteemed enlightened beyond those that have gone before it; and, indeed, when we consider the universal desire of knowledge which prevails among all ranks and degrees, the actual advancement of learning and science, the restless spirit of enquiry after truth, and by these means, the discovery of many errors which prejudice and ignorance had sanctified, it may, perhaps, be in some degree reasonable to join issue with those who so complacently survey the light of modern days, and look back with conscious superiority on the past. At the same time, however, a wise and cautious man will admire with reserve; he will argue

argue from the use of a good thing to the abuse of it ; he will suspect the possible consequences of new studies and opinions ; and he will apprehend the introduction of a pernicious system of doubt, in the most momentous concerns of mankind, from the encouragement of unrestrained speculations.

Reflections of this kind naturally occur to every serious observer of the present face of worldly affairs. As much as we appear improved in intellectual attainments, we have lost in practical virtue ; and although we have got rid of some unjust prejudices, we have taken up some false notions in their room. There is, also, a peculiar infelicity attendant upon the love of novelty, that by general favour it hath induced an undistinguishing aversion to ancient opinions, and hath had an unhappy tendency to weaken and undermine our old and established principles.

I shall refer, in this place, as the subject is of its particular province, to those novel doctrines concerning points of religion, which have been studiously disseminated, and supported openly and pertinaciously ; and in the present discourse upon the text before us, examine the validity of one special innovation attempted to be introduced into the Christian

faith, by an attack upon the doctrine of the attonement for sin made by the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross ; an article of our belief, which, of all others, one should have imagined a Christian would have been most unwilling to have disputed, even if there had been, which I trust there is not, any ground to doubt of it.

The substance of the objection is this, that the design of Christ's coming was to exhibit an example of unerring obedience to God's will, to deliver a most perfect form of doctrine, and to be a pattern of unblemished innocence, in purity of heart and behaviour, to all future generations ; that his office was to teach repentance from sin, and the promise of its acceptance with God ; *that his death was to bear testimony to his doctrines*, and in order to shew, by his resurrection from the dead, the certainty of the general resurrection of the body to a final judgment and retribution ; that the idea of atonement for the sins of others, by a vicarious punishment, is not agreeable to the general rules of justice, and is even absurd ; nay, that the first fathers of the church never entertained it.

It is, indeed, true, that our Saviour *did* all these things, but they were not the *sole* cause of his mission, or the *only* effect

effect of his death and sufferings—He came, as the Prophet informs us, to *save* his people from their sins ; now, had it been true that complete obedience to God's ordinances was sufficient of itself to the salvation of the world, then might Enoch, who *walked with God*, and who was, on that account, exempted from the common lot of humanity, have been the saviour of the old world. Could mankind have been redeemed merely by the promulgation of a more complete system than the law of Moses, then could that more perfect will of God have been revealed by any other messenger than Christ. The Prophets, indeed, did go beyond the mere law in their denunciations, and proclaimed the inefficacy of rites and ceremonies to the taking away of sin. Could the righteousness of any one of God's Saints have delivered sinners from the divine wrath, *then* might Noah, Daniel, or Job, have been their saviour ; yet this God himself hath expressly declared against, by the mouth of inspiration, as Ezekiel gives it us—“ Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out my hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it. Though

these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord." So that the piety and uprightness of any eminent favourites of God, could not save others from a temporal calamity, inflicted for the punishment of their sins, much less from eternal condemnation. If the death of Christ had no other meaning or consequence than the giving credit to his doctrine and precepts, by a perseverance and constancy in them to that extremity, then was it not to be distinguished from the death of the Prophets who went before him, and bore testimony to the truth by their sufferings. So that, upon this scheme, there does not seem to have been any extraordinary purpose effected by the coming of our Saviour; nothing uncommon in the means of men's salvation; no wonderful exertion of God's providence; but that which was done by Christ might as well have been compleated by any other, and, indeed, does not appear to have been at all necessary.

Perhaps this very slight view of the objection, and the easy answer to which it is liable, will be at once satisfactory to many; but we may further remark, that the phrase, *to save* from any danger or calamity, to become the *Saviour* or *Deliverer*,

liverer, does imply some *action* to be performed, and not merely the *publication* or *discovery* of the *means* by which evil may be averted, or the placing men in a situation by which *they may save themselves*. If this idea of the expression be well founded, then let us apply the reasoning which flows from it, to the obedience, innocence, doctrine, and example, of our Lord, and it will not come up to the sense of that salvation which was promised through Jesus Christ. This was something to be done by *him only* for the whole race of men. It was what they could not do for themselves. It was to be a deed of so transcendant a nature, as *at once* to reconcile God to the world, and to save it from the punishment due to its sinfulness.

But, whatever force there be in this, still it will be contended, that such interpretation does not prove *the death* of Christ to have been *that* great act which should have obtained mercy for us ; and, least of all, that God, who delighteth not in the misery of his creatures, should require or accept an human sacrifice for the satisfaction of his vengeance, due to the rebellion of mankind ; that the notion is too sanguinary to consist with the justice of a good God, full of loving kindness and compassion, and is not only abhorrent

horrent from the nature of a Being we are taught to love, but inadequate to his purpose.

It must, indeed, be acknowledged, that upon mere principles of reason, according to man's understanding, and agreeable to our current opinions of justice, as administered by earthly tribunals, there occurs a difficulty insuperable by mortal wisdom ; but, then, this very circumstance, this very incapacity of *our* ability to accept or account for a dispensation which God himself, by the Prophet, calls, "his strange work, and his strange act," should recommend us to enquire at the oracle of God for the explanation of it. It is a knot, worthy the intervention of the Deity to unloose, which he has not disdained.

In this place, it may be proper, for a moment to go back again to our original observation, and reflect upon the wild work which speculative learning creates in a religious system ; what obscurity it occasions by attempting to throw in *new* lights, and into what depths it plunges its followers, from which, by all the boasted wit and penetration of man, they cannot be recovered. Considering these things, we shall, perhaps, be convinced, that there are subjects to which human reasoning is not applicable ; that what God has

has clearly revealed, needs no comment or elucidation ; that what he has hidden, is not necessary to be found out, and if searched after, that it will never be discovered.

But, we say, that he *has* plainly declared himself upon this point.—When our Saviour, after his resurrection, conversed with two of his Disciples in the way to Emmaus, this was his language : “ O fools, and slow of heart, to believe all that the Prophets have spoken ! *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory ?*” Words cannot more strongly design the necessity of his death upon the cross ; for you will observe, that the very subject of their discourse had been his crucifixion, which, as they themselves confess, had filled their hearts with sorrow, because “ they trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” From whence it appears, that even his chosen followers, like the rest of the Jews, did not at that time clearly comprehend the nature or means of the promised redemption, though he had at least strongly *hinted* at the manner of it in many of his discourses with them. Thus, “ I am the good shepherd ; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father, and I *lay down my life*

life for the sheep." "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the Wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." As the one was the form of deliverance from temporal death, so was the other from that which is spiritual. This is his argument with Nicodemus, to which he subjoins this reason—"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he *gave* his only begotten Son." Which words of our Lord, recorded in St. John's Gospel, the same Apostle explains in his First Epistle, to signify the death of Christ, and the propitiation made thereby for our sins unto God. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he (Jesus Christ) *laid down his life for us.*" 3d chap. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be *the propitiation* for our sins." 4th chap. Again, our Saviour says, in St. John's Gospel, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

But the most precise revelation of this great truth is given by our Lord, in the institution of the sacrament. Thus, St. Matthew describes it—"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the Disciples,

Disciples, and said, Take, eat ; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it : *For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*"

Thus you have before you the testimony of Jesus Christ himself, to the cause, intent, and effect of his coming, sufferings, and death ; an authority, to which no human arguments can add, and from which neither the sophistry of the philosopher, nor the cavils of the infidel, can detract. He tells us himself, that thus it behoved Christ to suffer ; that it was his engagement, his duty, the object of his appearing in the world. In the very extreme trouble of his soul, he acknowledges, that he came for the *very purpose of dying*. What shall I say ? Father, save me from this hour.—But, answers he to himself, for this cause came I unto this hour.

Now, if the doctrine of atonement, built upon these Scriptures, be not true, it becomes those who object to it, to give *another and a more satisfactory interpretation* of the language in which they are written, which hath not been done. It would not add weight, perhaps, to the authority already cited, to bring forward the sentiments of our Saviour's *Disciples*, and

and especially of St. Paul, concerning the point now at issue between sceptics and believers, because the servant is not greater than his lord, and it was not possible that those who were taught and sent forth by Jesus Christ himself, should advance opinions of *their own* in matters of faith, or deliver any other system to the world than that which *he* had delivered to *them*, to be proclaimed and implicitly to be received. But the uniform tenor of their writings will at least bear testimony to this circumstance, that neither they, nor any of those who became Christians by their preaching, doubted of the effect and intent of our Saviour's crucifixion, being that sacrifice and propitiation for the sins of the world which the Prophets, and Christ himself, asserted it to be, and as the best men *believe* it to be at this day. For I do not call those Christians, who disputed with the Apostles about the nature of Christ, denying that he really did come in the flesh, or really did suffer; neither do I admit those of later times to be believers in him, who setting up their own wisdom against revelation, cavil about the meaning of express declarations of Scripture.

I will cite, from the Epistles, a few texts, out of many, which apply strictly and forcibly to a confirmation of the belief

belief in the atonement made by Christ. St. Paul, in the 5th chap. to the Romans, speaks thus—" For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God commendeth his love towards us, in that whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. For if, whilst we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son ; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." The meaning of which passage is simply this, that the death of Christ, though accepted by God as a sacrifice for sins, may be ineffectual, if we *continue* in them ; that it is our obedience and virtue, *after the example of Christ's life*, which will *confirm* the favour of God to us. The original and prevailing motive with God to be intreated for mankind, is the death of his Son ; without it, we could not be accepted. To this, therefore, as the *cause* of our justification, must be referred every thing that man can do of himself, to co-operate with the grace of God to salvation. Had it been, indeed, otherwise, the death of Christ would have been vain, and men might be saved by their own righteousness. But hear the Apostle a little further—" And not only so," says he, " but we joy also in God, through Jesus Christ, by whom we have now

now received the *atonement.*" That is, we are not only relieved from the just fears of an angry and terrible God, by the atonement made to him by Jesus Christ, but we are encouraged to look up to him with other and better sentiments ; to *love* him, and *rejoice* in the confidence of his being our Father, merciful, full of compassion and goodness. I cannot omit, in this place, the prophecy of Isaiah, the "sure word of prophecy," as it is called, direct to the argument—" He shall see of the travail of his soul, and be *satisfied* ; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, *for he shall bear their iniquities.*" What is meant by this phrase of bearing their iniquities, is interpreted by St. Peter, thus—" Who himself bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin might live unto righteousness ; by whose stripes ye were healed." Passing over other testimonies out of St. Paul, we find the whole Epistle to the Hebrews full of this doctrine. Thus—" We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the Angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that he, by the grace (that is, the mercy and favour) of God, should *taste death for every man.*" Chap. 2, ver. 9, Which is more plainly declared in the

4th chap. where, describing the sacrifices under the law, and the effect of them, he magnifies the death of Christ in these words—" Almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission." Such was the case under the law of Moses, where the heifer offered by the high priest once every year, for the sins of the people, is likened to the offering of Christ, as, indeed, it was intended to be a type of it. But, then (adds the Apostle) here lies the superiority of the one to the other, that " Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, as did the high priest, but into Heaven itself. Nor yet that he should offer himself *often*, as the high priest entered *every year*, with the blood of *others*, for then must he have *often* suffered, but now *once* in the end of the world hath he appeared, *to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*. And as it is appointed to men *once* to die, and after this the judgment; so Christ was *once offered to bear the sins of many*."

From this comparison, it is, beyond all question, apparent, that the sacrifice of the *new covenant*, *once* for all, was to be understood in the same manner, though not in the same degree, as the *yearly sacrifice under the old covenant*;

and under that dispensation, we hear, that, "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." Now, as long as these words remain in the holy Scriptures, I defy the art or malice of infidels to torture the expressions of God's revealed will, to support a denial of the atonement made by Christ. But it may be objected, that in the very Epistle from whence I argue, it is said, notwithstanding; that "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins," and yet that Christ's death is assimilated to those sacrifices. The Apostle himself has given the reason; because in those sacrifices there is a *remembrance* of sins made every year, and therefore the comers unto them could not be made perfect or clean in God's sight *thereby*. And he goes on, in the same chapter, (the 10th) to shew, from the Book of Psalms, that the first is *taken away to establish the second*, agreeable to another Scripture, which had been before cited in this Epistle from the 32nd of Jeremiah — "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a *new* covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah," the consequence of which he describes to be, that, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousnesses, and their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more."

more." Under the old covenant, there was a *remembrance every year of sins*; under the new, they are *remembered no more*.

I would recommend this Epistle to the Hebrews to the serious perusal of every Christian, and principally to the attention of those *who doubt*, that they may be assured themselves, and be enabled to give an answer, concerning the faith, to those who ask of them. But entirely to close the evidence in support of the great cause we are defending, let us, for a moment, look at the Book of Revelations; let us see the glory of Christ in his state of exaltation, and hear the testimony of the Angels themselves, to this extraordinary act of mercy and goodness. "And they sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, *for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood*, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." After this, which is in the 5th chapter, it is not very material to enquire who is the disputer of this world; and even if the fathers of the church were against the doctrine (which is not true, for their writings bear witness to the contrary) I would rather commit my salvation to the word of God, than to the opinions of any uninspired men whatsoever.

However, before I make an end, it may be proper to rectify one error concerning this point, which some men have fallen into; viz. that because the opinion of certain enthusiasts agrees with the church, concerning the divinity of Christ and other matters, not allowed by the sceptics; *therefore* we agree with them in all their extravagancies and absurdities. *Their* notion is this; that the blood of Christ is all sufficient to salvation, *without any act* of their own; and, indeed, this is carried so far, as to exclude any *attempt* of their own to obtain the favour of God; so that a perverse interpretation of Scripture is applied to render the greatest sinners secure of their salvation, and *that, even though they should continue* in their sins. For if a man is once satisfied, that the death of Christ is, by the imputation of his merits, sufficient to his justification, and that his own righteousness is altogether unprofitable; the idea is so favourable to the general carelessness of men about their lives, that they readily cast their burden upon the Lord, and are confident they shall be saved by their *faith* alone.

Now, the truth in this case, as in most others, lies between the two extremes. *We do not hold the doctrine of the methodists above-mentioned, neither do we, with*

with the advocates of human reason, set our faces against the declarations of Scripture, and suppose that our own holiness or obedience could be acceptable with God unto salvation, *independent* of the sacrifice of his Son; for though he has told us, that the vengeance justly due to the iniquities of mankind, is satisfied by that atonement; that the death of Christ is the propitiation for our sins; that it conciliates the affections of our heavenly Father, and makes us *capable* of entering into covenant with him; yet has he nowhere said, that his mercy is *unconditional*, or that we are to "continue in sin, that grace may abound." Notwithstanding the great privilege to which we are admitted, through the sufferings of Christ, yet we are not to be "high minded, but to fear;" and to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling." In short, we are so to look upon the death of Christ, as that, without which we could not have been saved; but, at the same time, that it is no cloak for our sins, or will redeem us from the wrath to come, if we crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to a perpetual shame.

[When I call the disputation against the atonement, a novelty, I mean, that it is new to the common people, whom unbelievers attempt to corrupt by the private dispersion of infidel tracts.] 26 MR 59

END OF DISCOURSE VI.

DISCOURSE VII.

PHILIPPIANS, Chap. II. Ver. 5, &c.

*Let this Mind be in you, which was also
in Christ Jesus; who, being in the Form
of God, thought it not Robbery to be
equal with God; but made himself of
no Reputation, and took upon him the
Form of a Servant; and being found
in Fashion as a Man, he humbled him-
self, and became obedient unto Death,
even the Death of the Cross.*

THREE are many passages in the holy Scriptures, that lay down positions necessary to be received as true, which are yet absolutely beyond the reach of human wisdom or ingenuity to *explain*. They are, for the most part, such as have been rather asserted, than discussed at length, by the sacred historians, and must therefore be accepted upon their authority. Of this sort is the doctrine concerning the divinity of our Saviour subsisting

sisting in the flesh, which involves in it the consideration of his pre-existent state before he came into the world. This is, indeed, a subject of sublime contemplation, but, at the same time, a mystery so profound, that we cannot fathom the depth of it.

Upon the difficulty in which our want of more excellent knowledge places us, respecting this point of our faith, unbelievers have raised an objection to it, insisting, that Christ was a mere man, like ourselves ; and they are desperate enough to contend, that the proofs on which such opinion is justified, may be found in the Gospel itself.

The reasons upon which their notion of our Lord's simple humanity is grounded, are taken from various parts of his history ; such as the words of Mary—“ Thy father (meaning Joseph) and I have fought thee sorrowing.” His being subject to all the passions and feelings of human nature, and, in particular, to the fear of death : His growing in stature and wisdom ; his eating and drinking, living, and at last dying, like other men. The first particular is of the most consequence ; and to this I answer, that his *conception* was certainly preternatural—and, that at the very instant the Angel Gabriel salutes Mary, with—Hail ! thou that

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art highly favoured ! he tells her, that the *holy thing* which shall be born of her, shall be by the *influence of the holy Spirit*, therefore certainly not by man ; for the words, *holy thing*, do signify of themselves something *more* than a mere child of the generation of man. And in the same place, where Mary *seems* to call *Joseph his father*, our Lord clearly declares himself to be the Son of *another Father*—“ Wot ye not that I must be about *my Father's business*.”

In dealing with the enemies of Christ, it is unsafe to speak other language than that of the Scriptures, or to attempt accurate and precise explications (however assured we may be in ourselves that they are just) of such secret things of God as are only *spoken of*, and not fully *revealed*. I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, give you principally the words of holy writ, with some observations which obviously result from them ; and to lead us into the true method of understanding this great question, I will submit to you five heads of enquiry. First, Whether there is authority in Scripture for *any* pre-existence of our Saviour. Secondly, *What* was the nature of it. Thirdly, Whether our Lord, as a divine person, is *any where* spoken of as the Saviour, and in what manner. Fourthly, Whether

Whether the salvation promised to mankind was to be by a death or sacrifice. Fifthly, *How Christ was enabled to be that sacrifice.*

In the prophecies concerning our Saviour, great as the titles are with which he is dignified, there is not one which directly speaks of him as a *divine personage*, except that of David, in the Psalms—"Sacrifice and burnt offering thou wouldest not, but mine ears hast thou opened." Which last words are altered in the Epistle to the Hebrews—"A body hast thou prepared for me." Alluding plainly to that change which should take place in order to fit our Saviour for that very expiation and atonement there spoken of. But the Jews had no idea of any pre-existence at all, and when our Lord first signified it to them, were offended. It is also remarkable, that neither of the three first Evangelists make any mention of such an opinion, but that St. John, who wrote his Gospel towards the close of his life, at least fifty years after our Saviour, should alone speak of it. In his 7th chap. he recites the *words* of our Lord himself, so that the authority is indisputable: His discourse is to the people who followed him—"The bread of God is *he* (not *it*) that cometh down from Heaven, and giveth

giveth light unto the world." " *I came down from Heaven*, not to do my own will, but the will of him which sent me." " *I am the living bread which came down from Heaven.*" His Disciples, when they heard these words, murmured, not comprehending them; upon which he adds this express declaration—" What, and if ye should see the Son of Man *ascend up where he was before?*" So that it is needless, after such a testimony as this, to attempt other proofs of the *being* of Christ before he came into the world; and, therefore, the first question is resolved, that he did pre-exist.

But, secondly, we ask, how, and in what nature? To this St. John answers, that " In the *beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was God.*" Our Saviour himself tells the Jews—" *Before Abraham was, I am,*" which Bishop Sherlock interprets to be an explicit claim of our Saviour to divinity; this, *I am*, being the very name by which God commanded Moses to declare him to Pharoah. Which opinion, however it may be combated (as it has been) does certainly receive strength from the behaviour of the Jews upon that occasion, for they would have stoned him, as for blasphemy; which they would also have done, when he, in
another

another place, asserted, that he and his Father *were one*, and they then gave this public reason for it—"For a good work we stone thee not, but because thou, *being a man, makest thyself God.*" In the ancient prophecies, as I have before observed to you, it was not signified that the Saviour of the world should be a *divine person*, much less that he should be the Son of God himself. The Jews, all along, expected a *temporal prince*, who should restore their *kingdom*; and as hitherto all the blessings they had received had been of *this world*, they did not look to a *spiritual deliverance*. But, in fine, our Saviour, in the following words, has put an end to the controversy. You will find them in the 17th of St. John.—"And now, O Father, glorify thou *me* with thine *ownself, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*" What that glory was, we cannot form any idea of, so as to say more than the Apostle to the Hebrews, that it was "the brightness of his Father's glory, the express image of his person;" which, indeed, does represent to the imagination something amazing and splendid, but which is neither fully to be described or conceived. There is, also, another circumstance, recorded by the same Evangelist, which corroborates the foregoing

going evidence ; that when St. Thomas was convinced of the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, he cried out, in an ecstasy—“ *My God ! and my Lord !*” *Immediately after which*, St. John has these remarkable words—“ Many other signs truly did Jesus, which are not written in this book ; but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, *the Son of God*, and that believing, ye might have life through his name.” You will observe, the words are not merely to believe that Jesus is the Christ, but that *the Christ was the Son of God*. Thus the second proposition is cleared up, concerning the divine nature of our Saviour.

But, now, when we make our third enquiry, whether Christ, in this his divine nature, is any where in Scripture promised to be the Saviour, there seems a difficulty ; for, although the prophecies did say, that a *virgin* should *conceive* and bring forth a son, who should be called Emanuel, which being interpreted, is, *God with us* ; yet, as in all other places he is described as the servant of God, the great Prophet, the Counsellor of the mighty God, the Prince of Peace, those words rather convey a sense of the power of God being with him, than of a divine person, much more of God himself upon earth.

earth. Besides, God is a spirit, and invisible, as must also have been Christ in his state of glory. Moreover, it would have been incompatible with the nature of a glorified Spirit, that it should submit to the condition of mortality, and die like men; and, in consequence, should in that state perform the mercy promised to the fathers, by bringing salvation unto all the world. For, in answer to our fourth head of enquiry, Christ himself declares, that he was to be a sacrifice and an atonement for sin by his own blood. All this, therefore, seems hitherto, upon this point, a contradiction—that the Christ should be the Son of God—that this Son of God had glory with him from the beginning, *and yet*, that *this very person* should save his people from their sins by laying down his life for the sheep. Still, however opposite as all these assertions seem to be to each other, every article is true, if the Scripture be true, which cannot be broken. It is marvellous in our own eyes, yet it is truth incontestible, though the *manner* of God's working be not discernible, or intended to be scanned by mortals.

But, as far as it was *necessary* for us to know, St. Paul has discovered to us in the text, which is the fifth object of enquiry;

quiry ; viz. how, under all the circumstances before-mentioned, Christ *did* become capable of making himself a sacrifice for sin. First, being in the *form* of God. This cannot mean *figure*, or *shape*, or *personal* appearance, as we understand those terms applied to *human* bodies, for God is a Spirit without parts or passions, and no man hath seen God at any time ; but it signifies all that ever was visible, or can be conceived of his visibility, the *brightness* of his glory, as attributed to the Son, in the Epistle to the Hebrews—that which Moses saw in the Mount, that which filled the Holy of Holies, that which the Apostles saw at Christ's transfiguration ; all which belonged to him as the only begotten Son of the Eternal. Secondly, whilst in this *state*, *he thought it not robbery to be equal with God* ; that is, as far as a Son having equality with his Father ; As the brightness is to the glory ; as the express *representation* is to the *real* character ; as he appeared to St. Paul, or as God is said to appear in the Old Testament. Being thus in his pristine state of essential equality with the Father in Heaven, he in no respect robbed God of his glory by a participation of it with him ; neither did he desire to appear upon earth cloathed with his appropriate attributes, which would

would have been inconsistent with the office of a Redeemer ; but, instead of retaining that equal dignity of the god-head, he, thirdly, made himself of no reputation, or, as the right translation is, *he emptied himself of all his glory*, he laid aside his divinity, and *took upon him the form of a servant*, which words allude to his readily undertaking the salvation of mankind—“ In the volume of the book it is written of me that I should do thy will ; O my God, I am content to do it, yea, thy law is within my heart.” In Isaiah, also, is the same reference—“ By this knowledge shall my righteous Servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.” Thus, *he humbled himself, and being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death.* That is, fourthly, having *put off* that divine essence which would have made him *incapable of death*, he took upon him our flesh to *qualify himself* for that great work of the redemption of mankind, which he was to purchase with his blood.

You have here, then, a great mystery revealed to you, into which it becomes us not to attempt, with curious eyes, to search *further* than it has pleased God to discover to us his dealings, but rather to admire and adore, with gratitude and humility, the mercy and goodness of God,

God, which spared not his *own* Son for our sakes. And with what love and affectionate obedience should we contemplate that Son of the most High, God of God, Light of Light, who *degraded* himself that he might raise us to Heaven, who *died* that we might *live* through him.

From this deduction, I hope it is intelligible to you how two natures (as it is called) are attributed to Christ, one in his state of glory *before* his incarnation, which was *divine*; the other, when he was born of a woman into the world, which was *human*. By the first, he was the *word* of God, by which the Heavens were made; by the second, he was the *man* Christ Jesus. Hereby is explained the expression of the Apostle, that the *word* was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us; and we also understand what St. Peter means by seeing his “glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” which was seen at his transfiguration, even the representation of God in his Son, who is grace and truth itself.

I must now say a few words on the conclusion of the latter part of the verse in the Philippians, whence the text is taken—“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which

which is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." The meaning of this, is, the exaltation of Christ's *human nature*, by which he is made judge of all the world, by which our prayers to him are justified and ordained ; and there are many expressions to the same purpose in the Epistles of the New Testament.

But I must not omit mentioning to you, that certain curious questions have been agitated concerning this matter, such as, whether the two natures, divine and human, did subsist in Christ whilst on earth ? or, as the common phrase is, whether he were, at one and the same time, both God and man ? If it is allowed they did *not*, then, say the adversaries, he was a *mere* man. If we insist upon it that they *did*, then they object our Saviour's *own* language, that he could do nothing of *himself*, that he attributed all his mighty works to the power of God, that he knew not the day of judgment, that he was subject to all the infirmities and sensations of man. It is a fearful subject to enter upon, lest, on the one part, we assume too much ; or, on the other, do not vindicate the honour of our Master. So far, without doubt,

doubt, we have plain and strong evidence with us, that his immaculate and miraculous conception must place him, in that respect, entirely out of the lot of humanity. Taking this, therefore, with the declaration of our Lord himself, wherein he asserts his divinity, the voice of God from the cloud, at his baptism, and at other times proclaiming him to *be his Son*, I know not how we can presume, that he was so *totally* divested of that essential property of the godhead, which he had before the world was, as to become, absolutely speaking, a mere mortal like ourselves. Neither is it consonant to common sense, if, indeed, common sense can judge of such things, that the transcendent spiritual nature of Christ should be lost, as it were, and obliterated, because it was cloathed with flesh, for the special purpose of man's redemption ; and had it been so, our Saviour's frequent allusions (to call them by no other name) to his heavenly nature, would have been impertinent, and even false. St. John wrote his Gospel purposely to support the doctrine of our Lord's divinity, which, had it not been of consequence to the faith, would have never been delivered by him. And, lastly, however the wisdom of men may be puzzled to reconcile what to them seems obscure

obscure and contradictory, we must rather, as I said at first, believe against our own want of perception, than contend with the oracles of God. For, as the whole scheme of our redemption is a miracle and a mystery, it stands entirely upon faith in God's word, and not upon any arguments we may deduce from the language of Scripture being in some places, obscure or unintelligible, according to human reason.

After all, we cannot pretend to say, that we know the counsel of God, or the process by which Christ became incarnate—how, then, can we say, that so much was taken of the divine nature into the flesh, and so much left out—But, then, as the divine spirit or divinity of Christ could not be annihilated, where went it? I ask this question to shew the absurdity of scrutinizing into a matter, where the power of God, with whom all things are possible, is alone concerned. It would, truly, have been more level to the understanding and comprehension of men, that Christ *should have been a mere man* in all respects; but, because he was *not* so, is the Scripture less credible? By the same rule, all miracles and extraordinary inspirations are untrue; nay, the very being of God may be doubted, because

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we see him not. I will, therefore, close all with this advice, which I hold good in the study of the Scriptures—Where there is obscurity, adhere to that opinion which best establishes the honour and glory of God.

[This Discourse is, for the greatest part, an abridgment of Sherlock's four Sermons on the same text.]

26 MR 59
END OF DISCOURSE VII.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ST. LUKE, Chap. XVI. Ver. 30.

And he said, Nay, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead, they will repent.

THE design of this parable is obvious enough, from its own evidence, but if we look back to the former part of the chapter, we shall observe more clearly the drift of it. Our Saviour had been reproving those who attempted to reconcile religion with the love of money, and the honour paid to riches, and he concludes his admonition with these words—"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." To which adds the Evangelist—"And the Pharisees, which were covetous, heard all these things, and they derided him; and he said unto them, Ye are they who justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God."

After which comes the little history now before us, the moral of which, as we express ourselves, applies full to the doctrine, and illustrates it.

The reproof of vices, though it be the duty of Christian ministers, is always an unpleasant exercise of their office, but is especially so, when they condemn those crimes or failings which they are scarce capable of committing themselves; for it is then suggested, that they find fault from envy and malice, and preach against those things which they would willingly enjoy, had they the power or the opportunity of doing so. Such is the case with riches, and the superior stations of life. The clergy are, for the most part, comparatively poor, and for this reason, the moment they begin to inveigh against the pride of life, they are suspected of mean, selfish, and invidious motives, which, unfortunately, not only makes them personally obnoxious, but their doctrine also ineffectual. It should, however, be remembered, that the Author of our religion was as destitute as any of his followers; and that if we now are offended from any perverse imputation upon the low condition of those who declare his word, the objection lies completely against the *whole* Gospel, which from the beginning was published and spread

spread abroad by the most obscure and indigent of men. And to such hearers, we must apply the language of our Lord, that he who shall be ashamed of him in this world, to that man, at the last day, he will answer—"I know you not, depart from me, thou worker of iniquity!" Taking it, therefore, for granted, that however high minded some may be, however puffed up with vain conceits of their own importance, however they may think themselves of consequence, and despise others, as did the Pharisees ; yet, as they probably would not forego the hopes of salvation for the vanities of the world, I shall venture to admonish them from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

The condition of these two persons is represented as very different ; the one was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day ; the other was a beggar, full of disease, and desirous to be fed with the crumbs of his table. It should seem, from the context, that the great man took no notice of this miserable object, that he indulged himself in luxury, without one thought of his distress, and though the spectacle of wretchedness was at his gate, it does not appear that there was an eye to have pity on him, or an hand to relieve him.

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The experience of every day points out to us similar instances, not only of situation, but of behaviour; the hardness of heart of the opulent, and the helpless condition of the poor. And although this sin, for a sin doubtless it is, be not so generally the reproach of this as of other countries, which I trust is one proof of piety and virtue, in some degree, among us, yet too many are the children of fortune to whom we must preach the special duties of their condition, who are still to be instructed in the use of God's dispensations, and the consequences which result from an imperfect knowledge of them, or from not considering at all.

The first view in which we ought to survey the different situations of men, is this, that they have not been placed in them entirely by *their own acts* or abilities; that the inequalities we observe are *designed* or *appointed* by Providence; and this will, of course, direct a thoughtful mind to reflect upon the *purposes* of Heaven, in bestowing or with-holding earthly blessings; it will teach moderation and benevolence to the mighty, humility and resignation to the mean. The want of this knowledge, or rather the unfruitfulness of that opportunity which he had of acquiring it, was the condemnation

condemnation of the rich man in the parable. He was vain and proud, for he was cloathed in purple and fine linen; he was luxurious and intemperate, for he fared sumptuously every day; he was unfeeling and selfish, for in the enjoyment of his own abundance and effeminacy, he regarded not the miseries of the wretch at his gate, whose distress he *must* have seen, though he did not compassionate it. A true picture, this, of the mere men of the world, who not only abuse in themselves the good gifts of God, but deny any participation of his benefits to the poor and the unhappy.

This, in *strictness*, is the sense of the gospel before us; but, in an *enlarged* view, many different observations arise from it. We cannot pass over the ostentatious splendor of *some*, which seems to overlook and despise the contracted and obscure state of others; the ease with which one degree of mankind *commands* the *superfluities* of life, and the *difficulties* with which another *struggles* to procure bare *necessaries*; the respect with which the opulent is followed, the disregard with which his inferior is passed by; the attention and care which the first experiences in sickness or calamity, the neglect and desertion which is too justly and too frequently the complaint of the last, under

under accident or disease. Look at the various *stages* of life ; the rising genius of the affluent is cultivated and encouraged ; the abilities of the poor are depressed or unnoticed, except so far as they may serve the interests of his superior. The old age of one rank of men is honoured, and relieved from those anxieties and uneasinesses which usually attend it ; the declining years of another are weighed down by the absence of all friendship, and the destitution of all comforts. And above all (which is the bitterest ingredient in the cup of mortal distinctions) one person looks forward with pleasing hopes to the future fortunes of his children ; he contemplates, beforehand, their greatness and their happiness ; whereas, another views his progeny as slaves and labourers in the vale of misery, and it grieves him that they ever saw the light.

One should think, that the mere philosophy of nature, the common dictates of morality, independent of any divine assistance or precept, would direct the thoughts of men to a right judgment concerning these distinctions, which are permitted or ordained of God. Every one must know, that all of us are formed of the same elements ; that we have all the same faculties, the same passions, the same

same feelings ; that, in this respect, there is *no* distinction among the sons of men ; and, therefore, a good man would consider, that he has no *right* to take advantage of fortune, or education, or the favour of the world (by which *he* is enabled to rise above his *natural* equals, to enlarge his faculties above *their* reach, to gratify his passions above *their* ability, or to screen himself from those evils which *they must* endure) in such a manner, as to aggravate that sensibility which they must, *as men*, entertain of the great disparity of their condition ; or, what is worse, to occasion an inferior to repine at the distributions of the Deity, and to curse the existence he has bestowed upon him.

All happiness being by comparison, which must be formed either by reason, or the eye, or by actual feeling ; and the mass of mankind, which is also the lowest part, being incapable of deep reflection, they form opinions from what they *see*, and from what they *suffer*. Hence it is, that the prosperity, the abundance, the equipage, the servants, the very dress of their superiors, however they may be sometimes objects of their admiration, do also not unfrequently occasion envy and inquietude, grief and discontent, when they observe their own comparative

tive meanness ; and, more especially, when from the sense of distresses which others are exempt from, *they are forced to lament their inequality.*

Indeed, apart from that criminal indifference to the afflictions of the indigent, which is the accusation of the rich man in the parable, it is an heinous addition to the charge, that the public and ostentatious display of riches affronts the humble to his face, and *compels* himself to *confess*, as well as to *feel*, his poverty. It is the insulting triumph of pride over defenceless wretchedness. And yet these, in the sight of God, and in natural relation, are brethren ! If the commission of such outrage against humanity were confined to young prodigals or ignorant profligates, the want of wisdom would extenuate the crime ; but the *practice* of the *world* is in fault, and there is a want of principle rather than of knowledge. Was it a slight and venial fault, think you, for which the rich man was cast into hell ? Was it a mere folly or levity for which he was tormented ? Or, was it not the common wickedness of our days, the arrogance, superciliousness, profusion, selfishness, obduracy, of the children of the world ? I condemn even *amusements*, if, by their extravagance, one poor man hungers, one widow or one

one orphan mourns in vain. The judgment pronounced upon the rich man was precisely to this purpose——“Son, remember that thou in thy life hadst thy good things, and Lazarus, also, evil things, but *now* he is comforted and thou art tormented.”

An objection may *possibly*, though not *reasonably*, be started in this place. Was it then the *sole fault* of this person that he was *rich*? Was he punished *because he had* these good things? And was the beggar received into Abraham’s bosom simply because he was a miserable outcast? And was *poverty* his merit? The history, if attended to, clears up the difficulty; for we read, that though the rich man was adorned with all the excesses of apparel, the poor man was in rags, and that he suffered him to remain so. We see the ~~a~~ery dogs more pitiful than the rich man, for they licked the sores of the poor. And we remark, that though he desired only to be fed of the *crumbs* which fell from the rich man’s table, it does not appear that even that pittance was held out to him. From this circumstance, also, it is to be understood by what rule Christian benevolence may be measured. Not that a man of wealth should distribute *all* his fortune to those who may want, but that of his *superfluity*;

fluity; from the *crumbs which fall from his table*, he should administer to their necessities; and as the parable was *chiefly* intended to reprove the iniquity of the rich, there was no *occasion* to set forth any merit in the indigent. It was sufficient for our Lord's purpose that he should *assure* the afflicted in this world, that they would have consolation in the next.

Having thus stated the crime and the punishment of this worldly man, before I proceed to observe upon the defence he seems to set up, I will advert to a little particular, which I apprehend was thrown in, like small objects into a picture, to express more forcibly the base character of the offender, and his misery. He is represented as imploring Abraham that he would send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue, for he was tormented in that flame. All his pride was gone: The earth, to which he was so attached, could no longer befriend him, and he desires that person, above all others, whom he had despised and rejected, whom he had neglected and insulted, to have compassion upon his agonies, and to afford him some ease under them; which plainly corresponds with many examples that occur, of mean and abject spirits, who having,

having, in the day of prosperity, trampled upon the inferior orders of men, are ready, in any *reverse* of fortune, to crouch and crawl to the feet of the lowest wretch who may be disposed to protect and relieve them.

But, now, what excuse does he alledge for that behaviour in life, which he at last finds to be his condemnation? The plea is, want of knowledge, and of that instruction in regard to things, lawful and otherwise, which should induce criminality. He insinuates, that he knew nothing of another life after this, and a future state of retribution; under which circumstances, he had given himself up to the pleasures and indulgences of the only state of existence he was assured of. And he seems to say further, that this was the common case of *all other* men; that he himself had five brethren, who lived as he had done, from the same persuasion, and therefore prays Abraham to send one from the dead, to convince them of their error, which, according to his *conception*, was the only means to convert them. There is an hint here given by our Saviour at the obstinacy of the Jews, who, except they saw signs and wonders, would not believe in him: And therefore, Abraham, whom they boasted of as their father, is represented

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as replying to this petition, that they had Moses and the Prophets, whom if they would not hear, no supernatural appearance would lead them to repentance. It was plain enough, indeed, had they inclined a willing ear to the doctrine; as our Saviour convinces them, when he proves the resurrection of the dead from the declaration of God, recorded by Moses—"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." "He is not," says Christ, "the God of the dead, but of the living."

Having thus, in the progress of this discourse, shewn the rich sensualist indefensible upon the grounds of natural instinct, reason, and religion; the same arguments must remain for ever in force against the same wickedness. And it concerns us to enquire, whether the charge lies against *us*, with all *our* knowledge and experience, when the philosophy of Epicurus (that pleasure is the chief good) is exploded, and the stubbornness and blindness of the Jews is a bye-word and a proverb. Unwise and vicious individuals will be found every where; but, I fear, luxury and extravagance, avarice, pride, vanity, ostentation, forgetfulness of what we are ourselves, neglect of God's service, licentiousness of manners, opinions, and language, a fort

sort of fastidious abhorrence of every thing that does not shew and shine, with a scornful neglect of mediocrity, and even *a shame* to have any acquaintance with the poor and the low, be they ever so deserving or indigent; I say, I fear that these are not the crime of a few, but of the many, in this country. The prosperity and happiness of the nation is become the national bane, and we are corrupted from being able to afford it. It matters not whether the plague comes from the *east* or from the *west*, if the body be infected; but certain it is, that through the abuse of riches and plenty, that alone is honourable which is excessive, neither is any thing so disgraceful as humility and modesty.

Now the plea of the rich man in the gospel, against the sentence of God, was, that he had no revelation of his will; and, as a warning to his brethren, he desired an instructor from the dead. But *we have that full revelation* which he required; *we have that very messenger* from the dead, even the Son of God, to call *us* to repentance, and to certify a future and eternal existence of rewards and punishments. *We have* the evidence and the authority which *he* wanted; we profess to be satisfied with it, yet do the same things, without the same pretence

to excuse ourselves. Some there are, pressed by this inevitable conclusion, and at the same time unwilling to forego the delights of the world, who have *affected to disbelieve* the gospel; because, if they confessed it, they must be self-condemned; which brings out a truth, not generally attended to, that more are infidels because they are vicious, than vicious because they are unbelievers. If the belief of God's goodness and mercy to mankind be shut out, all relative duties must be precarious; they *may possibly* subsist, indeed, from mere *natural* tenderness, but they can hardly be derived from any moral virtue, because morality is loose and unstable where there is no religious obligation to enforce it, and the tempers or caprices of men, their interests and their appetites, which belong solely to the *present state* of our being, contradict and oppose the divine law, as well as the divine example.

Such being the case, a good man will survey the world with a sigh, too justly apprehending, that the pleasures of the gay, the magnificence of the great, and the abundance of the affluent, are the prognostics of their perdition; and he will lament, that the destitute poor have so little part in the blessings of the earth, and that they must endure so much, before

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fore they are comforted in the bosom of their Father. Alas ! who then shall be saved ? Since “ wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and *many* there be which go in thereat ; but strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life, and *few* there be that find it.”

END OF DISCOURSE VIII.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE IX.

ST. LUKE, Chap. X. Ver. 26.

What is written in the Law? How readest thou?

THIS is the ground of an argument held with our Saviour by a Jewish Lawyer, in which, by the moral of a short story, invented for the purpose, our Lord convicts him, upon his own confession, of an unjust and narrow interpretation of the law of righteousness. We find, that the cause of the Lawyer's false judgment was hypocrisy, and that he supported it by a *cavil*, grounded upon the *terms* of the Mosaical institution, entirely opposite to the *spirit* and *meaning* of it. I will first treat this subject in a strict sense, for the benefit of the unlearned part of my audience, and then take a more extensive view of it, for the consideration of their superiors.

Every commandment of God may be evaded and rendered void, by a vicious construction; and bad men, like the Pharisees,

Pharisees, may be religious in the letter, and at the same time extremely wicked in the true sense of the ordinance. Thus, the first commandment, which directs adoration to be paid only to one God, may administer occasion to object to any reverence of the Son, or holy Spirit, which is actually the argument of some sectaries, and goes at one stroke to set at nought the Christian covenant, and the whole effect of the dispensation of salvation. So, also, of the second. A man may say, literally, that he is no idolater, that he worships no images, nor the likeness of any thing in the earth, the air, or the water ; but the great Apostle informs us, that *covetousness* is idolatry, and that he whose heart is fixed upon his money, is as completely a worshipper of false Gods, as were those who bowed down before the golden image set up by Nebuchadnezzar in the plain of Dura.

In the same manner, it may be the quibble of a reprobate, that he takes not God's name in vain, if he uses strange curses and oaths, if he only damns himself and his neighbour, or swears by his own soul. But whom does he call to witness, by this impious language, but the eternal God ? Whose vengeance does he demand upon his own head, or whose authority does he appeal to for the ratifica-

tion of his execrations, but that of the Almighty ? What profligate hypocrisy is this ? Does the Majesty of Heaven permit his laws to be thus trifled with ? Will his purity be content with such subterfuges, or acquit the heart of iniquity, because the mouth doth not pronounce the very words that are forbidden ? Again, is not the sabbath profaned as much by absence from the church, as by labour on the holy day ? Is it a day of rest, merely to be a day of idleness ? Is it sanctified by sleeping or drinking ? Or does it end at six o'clock, and revelry and licentiousness then become permitted ? The honour due to parents stands by this mode of construction upon the precarious meaning of the word in common life. What is honour ? A sound, a name, an inclination of the head, a gesture of the body ? We know not what it is. Thus, rebellion and disobedience in families may be justified, if external ceremoniousness be preserved.

In regard to murder, adultery, theft, which are written of in the law of God, if you ask a man, How readest thou ? he will answer, no doubt. I read as lawyers read ; convict me by evidence, and I am guilty, but I will quibble upon a syllable or a letter, and if I am acquitted in an human court of justice, I am absolved

solved before the tribunal of Heaven. Yet Satan is termed a murderer in Scripture, because his *delusions* brought death into the world. Our Saviour tells us, that to desire with a lustful eye is to commit *adultery*; and we ourselves, when injured, are as ready to call the man a robber who over-reaches us in our dealings, or with-holds from us our due, as if he had forcibly despoiled us of our purse or our estate.

But, above all, to the commandment about false witness, the very cavil of the Lawyer is immediately at hand; *Who is my neighbour?* It may be alledged, that false witness is forbidden against *this person only*, and not generally: It may be asked, *what* is false witness, and *where* is it prohibited? The language is *legal*, and confined therefore only to evidence of law. Scandal, calumny, detraction, though ever so pernicious, are *not* prohibited, and we may lye and prevaricate as we please, without blame or condemnation. But, surely, it requires some force upon the understanding to accept such a comment as this, and nothing could sanction the attempt, but the habit of evasion and shuffling which the wickedness of mankind has made the practical standard of their actions, and placed

in the chair of common sense and plain justice.

The tenth commandment one should, however, imagine, would be impossible to be evaded, for it attaches upon the very thoughts and inclinations of men ; yet even there, by a refined subtlety, the crime may be committed, though the letter of the law be not infringed. There may be a distinction taken between a man of my own country and a stranger or foreigner, which is a very ordinary mode of thinking. It may be urged, I do not *desire* what is another's, but I *envy* him the possession of it, for he is unworthy. I do not covet his estate whilst he can keep it, but I see he is a bad manager ; I will neither assist nor advise him, he will soon be obliged to sell what he has, and I will be the purchaser. Now, here the difference is merely between coveting and ill will, and he who can satisfy his mind with the distance between their precise meanings, may comfort himself with the discovery.

But, upon the whole, the conclusion is clearly this, that there is no law, divine or human, which may not, by some artificial interpretation, be rendered useless, and even sometimes bent into so crooked a direction, as to allow the commission of that very crime, which, virtually,

tually, it protests against. Upon this account, if any wise man could produce fables for children, which should place the large sense of the commandments in a striking point of view, he would be a benefactor to society ; for it is of daily observation, that cunning is one of the first exertions of the human intellect, and is too often encouraged as an accomplishment, probably advantageous in future ; whereas, more frequently it tends to make a man a knave and an impostor all his life afterwards.

A *good* lawyer studies and acts upon the great scale of principles ; whereas, a keen practical professionist, who looks at the written word only, will never quit the meanness of chicanery, whatever may be his rank or success. Such a one was he, who, enquiring of our Lord what he should do to inherit eternal life, seems, notwithstanding, unwilling to have been saved, unless he could owe his salvation to a quibble. But, without confining ourselves to the single point aimed at in the gospel, we may observe, generally, that this is the common practice of mankind, in all cases where *prejudice*, *custom*, *fashion*, or *favour*, have given currency to partial opinions ; or where the mind is biased and perverted by *interest*. The passions, also, of men, are ready

ready to corrupt their sentiments, and turn aside their actions from that which in itself, unconnected with any other circumstances, would be right and just, upon the broad principles of reason and equity. Through prejudice, which is either a rash judgment *without* enquiry, or an opinion ignorantly taken up, and obstinately persisted in, the greatest injuries have been committed against others, and the deepest disgrace hath been incurred by ourselvess. Through the influence of this blind guide, the Europeans have for centuries exercised upon the wretched people of Africa intolerable cruelties, without remorse ; and, as it should seem, from the cool regularity of their proceedings, they are perfectly insensible and unconscious of any crime in the practice. Montesquieu ironically accounts for their conduct, by contending, that negroes cannot be *men*, because they are black ; and that they must rather be *beasts*, because they have wool upon their heads and not hair. Nay, at this hour, it is difficult to persuade a West Indian of the iniquity of tearing husbands from their wives, children from their parents, and dissolving all the tender amities of nature, in separation and slavery, for filthy lucre ; for he argues, that his fortune was embarked in the trade, in confidence

fidence of its continuance, and that the oppression of abolishing it lies heavier upon him, than any sufferings of the mind or body upon the slave. Which is as much as to say, that all errors *ought* to be inveterate, and that crimes lose their name and nature when they are convenient ; so that prejudice first darkens the understanding, and then interest prevents its being enlightened.

I could give instances, of an inferior degree, in respect to many other cases, which occur daily, where the affections of men are estranged from each other by nothing but denominations or bye-words, respecting sects, professions, or even professional appellations. It is thus taken for granted, that one set of men will always swear falsely for hire ; a second are hypocrites and impostors ; a third will, beyond all question, cheat you ; and a fourth will tyrannize over you, if they have power. Absurd and indefensible as is this persuasion, men are so possessed with it, that a sort of persecution ensues against those who are so unfortunate as to be distinguished by obnoxious names, and the human race is likened to the beasts of the forests ; yet, if this analogy were turned to a good purpose, we might reflect, that many wild and savage animals are reclaimed

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by good and kind treatment, and that nothing is from nature so desperately evil, as not to be convertible, by management, to the benefit of mankind. And I mean it, further, as an hint to those who lose their innate virtue, through prejudices arising from a neglected education, or from those prejudices being kept alive by vicious antipathies ; which was the exact case of the Jews and Samaritans, to which the parable of our Saviour is directed.

But not to digress into similitudes which perhaps might not be applied, I observe, that habit and custom are nearly related to prejudice, and have the same consequence ; that is, when a man hath long used himself to a certain mode of acting and thinking, be it ever so improper, he will persist in it, and neither read the law of reason or of God ; for he will be governed by nothing but his own will. This assumed right plainly supersedes that question of our Lord—“ What is written ? how readest thou ?” It proceeds (to take the idea in its best possible sense) upon a supposition, that there are things indifferent, and at the arbitrary, unaccountable disposal of men ; which, I confess, is beyond my conception or comprehension. But it is, probably, the only plea upon which the cruelty of men

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to dumb animals is vindicated. One, in a fit of malice and rage, beats out the eyes of his horse; another deliberately tortures an ox; a third kills his dog by excessive chastisement. I am afraid habit and custom have enured us to bear these spectacles too patiently. Should you expostulate with any one, on account of such violence, he would reply, that the animal was his property, and he would do what he pleased with it. This position, in its extent, is unfounded; for it is the use of the creature, and not his life, which is the property. God has given man *dominion* over the animals, as he declares in the Book of Genefis, but not *despotism*. A good man is merciful to his beast, saith the Scripture; of course, therefore, he who is unmerciful is a bad man. The thing, then, is not indifferent, for there is a law which governs it; and if the *spirit* of this law were more generally inculcated, especially among those whose occupation is conversant with preparing animal food for man, it might mitigate the unfeelingness of a set of persons, who sometimes wantonly exercise a sort of privileged barbarity upon beasts, and birds, and fishes, destined to human sustenance.

But I must not quit this head of my discourse, without remarking upon a ca-

vil against this reasoning, or rather an excuse which is made for unnecessary cruelty to animals. It is argued, that they have no souls—This is much more than any philosopher can satisfactorily demonstrate, and, indeed, there are grounds to infer the contrary ; for they exhibit strong symptoms of a limited rationality, and, in some instances, appear to have a dread of dissolution, like other mortal beings ; but if they *have no part in futurity*, it is surely a strong argument against causelessly or barbarously depriving them of the *present*, and should render us more cautious of cutting short the little span of their lives, since it is *all* they have. The futility of this cavil, and of all others that would contract the glorious precepts of humanity, should be a lesson to those who kill poor defenceless and innocent animals in their sport, without a just object, or not for food ; that they are unmerciful men.

I am next to consider how *fashion* forms exceptions and special pleas against the positive or implied law of God ; and this I might do in one word, as well as by discussion—for fashion is folly. No statute, no rule, no precept, can fix that which is in itself volatile, and eludes every restraint by its own mere levity and airiness. But I will suggest two cases, in

in which most of you are concerned ; for the laws of modesty and morality are not unimportant. A certain nakedness and undressed shew of the body is often fashionable—There is no express restriction in the divine institutions as to dress, nor any act of human legislature to regulate it ; but all chaste eyes are disgusted, and there is a manifest offence committed against decency. By what possible subterfuge can it be imagined, that such a practice should be justified ? Why, it is said, there can be no shame where there is no consciousness of evil ; and further, that there can be no crime in shewing those perfections which the Creator has endowed us with ; that beauty was given to be admired, and not to be concealed ; and that the envy of those who have it not, occasions the accusation. I would reply only, that those who thus boastfully exhibit their beauty, manifest the deformity of their minds.

The other instance I shall produce regards *morals*. Marriage is honourable, and the bed undefiled, says the Apostle ; and there is much more added in the same place, which I need not recite. Now the practice of the times is concubinage, and *fashion* would place it on the same form with wedlock. The affections,

fections, say the men of the world, are as strong, the attachment is as sincere, the respect is as true and as great, the happiness is as real ! Wretched palliation of licentiousness ! Was there ever a woman really happy in concubinage ? What are those affections, but lust ? What is this attachment, but precarious gratification ? What is this respect, but civil condescension ? Where are the duties sanctioned by the divine word ? Where is the indissoluble tie of religion ? Can the blessing of God be invoked upon this intercourse ? Can the esteem of society follow it ? Where is the female's fame ? Where is her security from want ? What are the expectations of her progeny ? And, above all, will *fashion* satisfy the *conscience*, and speak peace, because the world pities and connives at the sin ?

The passions of men, in this as in all other instances, where they militate against piety and virtue, do find too ready acceptance for every plausible pretext, by which mankind liberates itself from that condemnation, which, if it were not in a manner *self-convicted*, would be unnecessary. The grand engine to affect this, is declamation upon the rights of nature, which, as they argue, to act up to her *own laws* and *privileges*,

vileges, must be perfectly *free*. This, truly, is a decisive device, for it sets aside, at one stroke, all legislation, divine and human. It admits no lawful restraint upon the emotions of man's will, and therefore does not so much except to the terms of any one law, as totally obliterate the whole. At present, I shall say nothing of the interests of the world, because every day shews they will support irreligion, and every species of immorality, against every regulation of good order and sobriety.

Thus have I laid before you, in brief, some of those subterfuges and cavils by which men attempt to excuse their imperfect obedience to the laws of religion, morality, and conscience, and have set forth the manner in which this is attempted, with the motives or inducements to the attempt. It appears, that the failure of men in their general duties does not arise from the difficulty of performing them, but from an unwilling mind; for God will allow for our weakness, though he will not wink at our prevarication. And a consideration of the highest importance should be constantly impressed upon us, that though confession of sins will entitle us to mercy, to defend our vices and faults, under false pretences and quibbles, is an impudent

dent effort to deceive infinite wisdom, and to deliver ourselves from his justice, by our own craft and subtlety. "Blessed is the man," saith David, "to whom the Lord imputeth no sin, and in whose *spirit* there is no guile." It is truth in the *inward* parts which will be our justification. Few have been the pure and perfect since the beginning of the world; but *one* there certainly was, who took upon himself all our natural infirmities, for the purpose of demonstrating the possibility of correcting our original corruptions. He has left us an example, that we should follow his steps; and we comé here to confess his authority, and listen to his word—Go ye, therefore, and do likewise!

END OF DISCOURSE IX.

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DISCOURSE X.

ST. JOHN, Chap. IV. Ver. 48.

*Except ye see Signs and Wonders, ye will
not believe.*

REILIGION, which defines the duties and forms the happiness of intelligent beings, is, and must be, as old as human action; because rational agency supposes a rule by which it ought to be governed, and no rule is paramount to man's reason, except the divine will and wisdom, which, when known, is obligatory. The only question then is, whether such will hath been always so signified as to be a law, superceding all other principles, by which men should be directed.

Now, I suppose no proposition is more clear than this, that the attribute of God's almighty power hath been ever manifest, and his good will to mankind hath been as constantly proved by the operations of that power. This would be evident from the very first exercise of the hu-

man intellect ; for in the most uncivilized state, or even in a solitary state, if man could remain in such condition, his immediate reflections would be engaged with those things which he saw above and around him, and he would apprehend that they must be made or produced by some unknown Being, superior to himself ; which Being, therefore, he would reverence. And next considering the usefulness of those things, the benefits and gratifications they administered to him, he would instinctively love the author of them.

It is, however, obvious, as well from the imperfection itself of this system, as from history and experience, that it neither did nor could produce more than partial good to mankind, and therefore, even if we had not the Scriptures, we should argue from the inherent and necessary attributes of a Creator, that, for the complete happiness of his creatures, he would impart to them, by other means, a larger knowledge of good and evil, and, consequently, of his own perfections. This, then, opens a new view to us ; for it will strongly infer, if not actually demonstrate, that all primitive religion must have been a revealed religion, and that pure, unmixed, natural law, or any philosophical morality built upon

upon it, could not have been simply proposed for the government of the world, if a Creator, with all the properties of his character, be acknowledged ; which is an answer to the theories of disputers. Hence, also, we have another proof of the authenticity of those sacred annals, which record the divers manners in which, at sundry times, God manifested himself to mankind, according to his wisdom ! so that when we read of visions and dreams being the channels of such communication to the ancient worshippers of Jehovah, and observe such things spoken of by the latest inspired writers, as incontestable and admitted, we see the chain of revelation reaching from the beginning of the world to the age of the gospel, and our reason being at once convinced of the use and necessity of it, we subscribe, without hesitation, to its truth and authority.

But we find, further, in examining the *method* and *means* by which the truth and perfection of divine knowledge were made known to mankind, that as *mere nature* or *philosophy* *could not* impart it, so neither *did* the declarations of God, or other significations of his will, such as those we have mentioned, stand *alone* in support of the great plan of Providence, for the instruction and guidance

of his creatures, but visible *signs* and *wonders* were often interposed, as extraordinary testimonies, to confirm the doctrines of his servants, to certify the faithfulness of his oracles, to strengthen the confidence of those who acknowledged him, and to shew openly his almighty power over *his* enemies and *theirs*. These acts we call miracles or appearances exciting amazement, because impossible to be traced to any *natural* causes, or the ordinary course of things, or capable of being produced by human exertions. Thus, therefore, religion, or our duty to *God*, and the sentiments which ought to be entertained of him, with morality, which is our duty to *society*, and ratified by religion, have been given to the world; derived first from natural principles; extended by their application, to social connections and necessities; authorised by revelation, and established by the evidence of miracles.

Every religion, even the corrupt and vain theology which we have received accounts of in ancient or modern history, pretends to rest upon these grounds, but especially upon miracles, which form our present subject of discussion; and, therefore, leaving other considerations, we will attempt to shew the distinction between true and false religions, by comparing

comparing the characteristics which mark preternatural acts and appearances in each of them, viz. the superior tendency of such miracles, respectively, to the glory of an infinite First Cause, which all allow to exist; and to the happiness of those creatures, particularly such as are endued with reason, which are produced by that Cause.

There have been but four systems of religion published and received by the world: Judaism, Paganism, Mahometanism, and Christianity. Moses, who is the historian of the first, has furnished us with the completest account of ancient miracles, beginning with the creation itself; which, except the incarnation of Jesus, is the most wonderful we can contemplate; wherein the power and the goodness of God are conspicuous, by the production of matter out of nothing; by the formation of an intelligent being, fitted for everlasting happiness, out of the dust; and the reduction of chaos into the beautiful order and harmony which we observe with our outward senses. The confusion of tongues, recorded by the same author, was also a miracle, whereby the earth was peopled; the more admirable, because, as David saith—"The fierceness of men was turned to the praise" of the Almighty.

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The birth of Isaac was a miracle, through whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed in the Redeemer. All the signs and wonders shewn before Pharoah were miracles, to manifest the *power* of God over the power of Satan, who dealt for the magicians of Egypt; and the deliverance of the Israelites in the Red Sea was a miracle, testifying the mercy and love of God to his people, no less than the overthrow of their enemies was a proof of his irresistible mightiness. All the supernatural acts spoken of in the Prophets, are of the same nature and design—Sometimes to terrify mankind, by astonishing calamities, from their idolatry and rebellion; sometimes to mollify and subdue their sinful ingratitude, by unexpected and incomprehensible mercies of pity and compassion to their wants and miseries; and, in every instance and deed, manifesting the greatness and glory of his kingdom, who ruleth over all, and the goodness, and care, and protection of him, who is at once the Lord and Father of the universe.

What argument can we hold concerning these operations, but, that he who performed them must be the *true God*, for the effects were as undeniable, as the impositions of other pretended deities were

were manifest from their fruits : And that *they* were *no* gods would be in proof, when their interposition was implored by their votaries, and they could not answer them. The Lord he is the God ! cried the convinced and convicted Israelites, when the prophets of Baal called in vain upon the dæmon of their worship, and the fire from Heaven, at the intercession of Elijah, burnt up the sacrifice, and licked up the water of the trench round the altar.

But, besides, the very purpose and end to which God's miracles were directed, do plainly decide, that he alone is true, and his law perfect. The strange and surprizing appearances produced by the agency of evil spirits, had no other object than to delude men into the slavery of sin ; to overpower their reason, and to sanctify their lusts ; to lead them into wickedness by the indulgence of their passions, and confirm them in it by ignorance, superstition, and fear : In fine, to corrupt their minds and destroy their souls. On the contrary, what did those miracles, truly divine, tend to ? What was *their* meaning and design ? They certainly could have no possible concern with those vices and crimes, which from the first, as well as by express ordinance afterwards, God had forbidden.

forbidden. He gave them, by various modes of revelation, the knowledge of himself and his attributes : He laid down the duties of piety, and how he would be served; together with the principles of justice, which they were mutually to exercise; and, in order to shew that he had the power to punish all disobedience and wrong, as well as to reward the fidelity of his servants, he displayed his will and his majesty in extraordinary acts, out of the course of nature, and beyond the influence of second causes ; so that it might be clearly understood, what an irresistible, and at the same time, what a beneficent Superior presided over things visible and invisible, and that not one of his works were done for other purposes, than to promote the happiness of men, through their virtue, purity, and steadfastness of obedience to him, in fear and reverence ; not merely consulting his own glory, but uniting it to their interests.

Accordingly, we do not find one miracle in the ancient scriptural records, which was not adapted to this important design of the creation. If God appears in terrors, it is to triumph over the insolence of his adversaries, and to strengthen the confidence of his people ; to rebuke the vanity of human pride, or to support the

the afflicted ; to correct wickedness, or to confirm the hopes and holiness of those who trusted in him. A religion founded on this basis, might well be supported by such miracles, as from their direction and consequences, would prove, that the author of them, and his statutes, were holy, and just, and true ; or, rather, I should say, that such divine author was holiness, justice, and truth itself.

The accounts we have from prophane authors, and principally poets, of what might be called monstrous delusions, rather than miracles, fabulous as they are, serve for testimonies of the impurity and falseness of the heathen mythology, if we had no other evidence against it. Instead of a sublime creation, the very narration of which elevates the soul, we read of a statue animated by fire, or men, derived from stones, cast behind the backs of two pious persons, delivered from a deluge : A story without sense or spirit, and which even heathens did not believe. We read of Gods metamorphised into the basest of animals, for the basest purposes ; or into trees, and metals, and rivers, without one single act being the result of such transformation, which could either instruct or amend mankind, or serve any purposes

poses but those of robbery, lewdness, oppression, drunkenness, and every species of immorality ; and yet piety was to be professed to these evil spirits, and the world was to be wise and good under *their* government.

It was impossible not to see that this system was false, from its own contradictions. First, that if virtue, as their philosophers allowed, were to form the felicity of mankind, then those signs and wonders, performed by such deities, could not promote it ; and, secondly, that such signs could not support a true religion, or have any connection with it, because every true religion must tend to the honour of its author, and to the good of those who believed in him ; whereas, every thing belonging to such an impious system as paganism, must prove the contrary, being founded on lies and foolishness, crimes and impurities.

In St. Paul's first chapter to the Romans, he gives a full and comprehensive view of the false worship of the ancient heathens, and the consequences of their errors, which, he seems to insinuate, was a judicial blindness. " They became," says he, " vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened ; professing themselves wise, they became fools,

fools, and changed the glory of an incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things ; therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind."

It was, however, reserved for more modern times, to propagate a religion of pleasure and indolence, and ceremonies of purification, abstinence in some things, and luxury in others ; and, above all, of fatalism, or the doctrine of predestination, which you may easily discern to be a mixture of all religions, Heathenism, Judaism, and Christianity.

But this, also (though it be not in the Koran) was of necessity to be upheld in after times, by pretended miracles ; which so truly corresponded with the monstrous absurdity of the plan of it, that you cannot invent any thing more preposterous. Mahomet, according to the tradition of his followers, flies thousands of miles through the air upon an ass, in the twinkling of an eye. He goes up into Heaven on the ass, and converses with the Angel Gabriel, and the ass talks also, and is, in fact, the principal agent in the conduct of his machine ; so that nothing, from the beginning to the end, can be more absurd, or more wicked, than these wonders, except it be the doctrines which such

such strange imposture was to support. It still subsists, however, to this day ; and, as I think, in some measure, through the effects of the climate in which it reigns, which disposes the inhabitants to inactivity of mind and sensuality, and makes them incapable, or unwilling, to be taught truth, and to exert themselves in virtue : Or, we may suppose, that that those precepts derived from Moses and Christ, which are here and there scattered in the Koran, are the means of saving it, for the present, from total contempt and dissolution.

Thus, I trust, it appears that these three religions have had miracles, real or pretended, attached to them, and that the truth or falsity of each system has been proved, from the drift, and design, and effect of those miracles. But this more eminently shines forth, when we come to consider the miracles of Christ. His religion was professedly a scheme of divine love, to shew mercy and kindness, and all the tender affections of a *Father*, to men, as his *children*; rather than of a ruler, to set forth his power. Our Saviour came to take away sorrow and care ; to bind up the wounds of the afflicted and broken hearted ; to bring peace and everlasting happiness into the world. To this end, all *his* miracles are appropriate :

appropriate: He expels devils, or the tormentors and deceivers of men ; he cures their most stubborn diseases at a touch or a word, and raises the dead to life. In the instance before us, referred to by the text, as in all others, he accompanies the deed with a declaration of the cause of it ; explaining it to be the reward of faith in him, as the great Redeemer, and the minister of God's favour, whose will it was that men should be comforted, and saved both from bodily and spiritual misery.

This, through the whole dispensation, is the grand scope and tenor of his practice. All is affection, kindness, pity, and compassion. Every relief or blessing, miraculously conferred, is of this nature and complexion, agreeing with the original declaration of the Prophets, concerning the counsel of God in sending down his Son from Heaven ; and, therefore, *these* miracles are standing proofs to corroborate the belief in Christ, because they exactly coincide with the design of his mission, and the very character of the Redeemer, who, in every sense, was to be the messenger of glad tidings to the earth. No religion ever so completely bestowed happiness upon the world, and no miracles ever so uniformly gave testimony to that religion. It is therefore

therefore true, because all the parts of it are consistent, and form a glorious entire of mercy and love.

There are but two miracles which in the smallest degree seem to fall from this rule; and even these, when examined, are shining evidences of its authenticity: The miracle at the marriage in Cana, and that of the tribute money found in the mouth of the fish. Of the first, it is justly thought to signify Christ's union with his church; but it may, also, be effectual to reprobate any other connection of the sexes than by marriage; and to declare, that the heathen and Jewish licentiousness was sinful in the sight of God. The purity of the water, made wine by the word of Christ, may shew, that the state of virgin simplicity, represented by the water, and exchanged for that of marriage, which is represented by the wine, into which it is transformed, emblematically signifies the alteration of virginity into a better and more worthy condition, and certifies us, that it was the will of Heaven that it should be so. The moral is, that the domestic harmony of society is thus best preserved; and it was a proper subject for the interposition of Christ, whose whole doctrine is *love*.

Of the other miracle, the object is to shew, that submission and obedience to
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the laws of human governments, of which God is the head and the author, does correspond with our submission to him ; and our obedience to them is justified and required, as a degree of obedience to the King of Heaven. This doctrine, as respecting the regularity, and order, and subordination of all the members of society, to law and legal superiors, is the principal stone in the building of human institutions, promoting and securing the felicity of men through all ranks and distinctions. This, therefore, was a miracle exactly fitted and agreeable to the character of Christ, who was himself the pattern of obedience and the Prince of Peace.

To conclude, then—it must be understood and believed, that the Christian religion stands upon the highest authority, compared with every other that the world has ever known ; that, though neither Jews nor philosophers could be converted by its precepts or its miracles, yet to us they are the grateful testimonies of the truth of God, in his promises and revelations, because they speak that language which his son expressly authenticated by his life, death, and resurrection—Peace upon the earth, and good-will towards men. 26 MR 59

END OF DISCOURSE X.

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DISCOURSE XI.

ST. JOHN, Chap. VI. Ver. 5 and 6.

Whence shall we buy Bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do.)

ALTHOUGH the miracles of Christ be the great proofs of his divine power, and were performed, as he declares, to convince the Jews that he came from God, and, at this day, are the records to which we apply for the confirmation of our belief in him, yet, in the history of those signs and wonders, there are many circumstances, apparently of little moment, which, on a more nice and strict attention to them, do add motives of admiration and love to that general reverence and gratitude, which every true Christian must entertain for his Redeemer. The more deeply we meditate upon his works, the more accurately we examine the particulars and incidents which accompanied them,

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the more exalted will be our affection to this Saviour of the world, the more enlarged will be our ideas of his heavenly benevolence to mankind.

The hasty and careless manner with which the holy Scriptures are too commonly perused, so unhappily lessens the effect of them on the mind, that the testimonies of the Lord, which ought to be the counsellors of the young, and the delight of the old, which equally concern *all*, are read to any good purpose by *few* among us. Whensoever, therefore, any portion of holy writ occurs, which at first sight may not strike the observation, it becomes us to examine, seriously, the language, the time, place, occasion, and other significant points belonging to it, that we may obtain the full sense and meaning of God's word, which otherwise would be of no more consequence to us, than a mere tale, told for amusement. With this view, we will make some remarks upon that Gospel of the day, which has been just recited to you.

The miracle of the loaves and fishes is reported in the 14th of St. Matthew, and the 6th of St. Mark, with some additions, which do not appear in St. John. It is said, in the two first Evangelists, that being in a desert, and the number

of his followers being very great, “ he had compassion upon the multitude, because they were as sheep having no shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.” If we consider this single circumstance, there could not be a more reasonable cause of pity. The Redeemer of the world sees those whom he came to save entirely ignorant and uninstructed, without the knowledge of God or his word, neglected and forlorn, deserted by their teachers, and, as the words of the Scripture express it, “ walking in darkness and the shadow of death.”— What the wretched state of such unfortunate men was, we may conceive from the misery we are witnesses of in many at this day, who, from the inattention and carelessness of those whose duty it is to inform them, are scarcely able to discern evil from good, who have mean and obscure notions of God and his attributes, and, above all, whose ideas of a merciful Saviour suffering and dying for their sakes, are imperfect and confused. And what a melancholy aggravation of this deplorable ignorance must it be (as doubtless it was to our Lord) that these poor creatures have teachable minds, that they are themselves sensible of their want of knowledge, and desire to be taught; that in the end they must be

be eternally happy or miserable, yet that “ no man careth for their souls ? ” How must it have “ grieved the holy spirit ” of Christ, to contemplate this destitute condition of his creatures ? With what anxiety and solicitude must he have laboured to enlighten their understandings, to correct their inclinations, to purify their hearts ? For this end “ the gospel was preached to the poor.” For this “ he went about doing good.” For this purpose he left his whole life an example to after ages, that they should follow his steps.

This is a solemn and important concern to us all ; not merely to the ministers of his word, but to every one, according to his ability ; for we are all instructed by him, and are all therefore, in our different degrees, his disciples. We are quick-fighted to the vices and crimes of mankind ; we reprobate the one, and we punish the other ; but should we not first think by what means the offence cometh ? Is there not often cause for compassion rather than judgment ? We are sensible that human nature, left to itself, is like the sheep without a shepherd ; that it will wander and stray in the wilderness of error and depravity ; that it will become wild and untractable, and be at length *lost*, be-

cause no pastor seeketh to find and to reclaim it.

Such is the figurative representation of many parables of the New Testament; but the plain meaning is, that we are by nature sinful and weak, headstrong and unwise; and that if we are not reformed by discipline and instruction, the final result must be our perdition. A man must be more than obdurate, indeed he must be his own enemy (for it is his condemnation) to look with indifference upon the ignorance of so many of his brethren, upon that decay of piety which ensues, and those flagrant iniquities which are the certain consequences of both. Surely it must affect any thinking Christian, to observe the frequent instances of those who, in sickness or adversity, have neither refuge nor helper; who know not where they are going, or what they shall do; and yet to reflect, that we could have "taught them many things," which would have administered hope, and patience, and consolation to their afflicted spirits. When we see a poor malefactor conducted to death for his crimes, does it not shock our consciences, to imagine, that possibly this wretch may be cut off from society, and that ignominy is entailed upon his generation, through the want of a religious education,

tion, from the ignorance of the law of the Lord, from the negligence or unconcern of those who ought to have been the guides of his youth? In the latter day, I fear, many shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, rising up in judgment, and condemning the wise, and even, perhaps, the virtuous, for, that knowing God themselves, they did not communicate of their store; that, seeing the deficiencies of “the multitude, they had not compassion upon them,” nor instructed them in the things which belonged to their peace.

These short observations are suggested by the conduct of our Saviour, described to us by St. Matthew and St. Mark, previous to the miracle, as related by St. John; and this introduction of it does further intimate to us, that though our Lord saw the necessities of their bodies, his *first* care was of their souls. We must and do acknowledge this to be the most important concern; the best relief we can afford; as it is the better part of our compound nature, which receives the benefit. Yet, with what strange thoughtlessness do we act continually, when we think we do service to God, by cloathing the hungry, and feeding the naked, unaccompanied by a single sentiment

sentiment or expression of religious advice or information. We seem ourselves to have mistaken the way, as well as to have omitted directing others into it. Not that generosity and liberality are of no account, but that they are heathen virtues, unless the design and effect do arise from, and terminate in, the *Christian graces* of compassion and charity.

To feel for the sufferings of humanity, or to alleviate them, merely from natural impulse or easiness of temper, is not that which our Lord principally intended to recommend, neither was it the sole motive of his exertion of his divine power; for the influence of such an act would have been transient, and carried no permanent benefit with it, as we perceive is the general case with most of those benevolences and kindnesses of men to each other. But *his* intent, as we may reasonably argue from what comes after in this chapter of St. John, was to direct, primarily, their minds to the Creator of the universe; to inculcate the doctrines of his immense and universal love to his whole creation; then, to explain how, in innumerable modes and methods, he had *demonstrated* the same; and, lastly, in that supreme and stupendous sign of it, by sending his own Son, in the fulness of his might and wisdom, to teach and

and to save mankind. And having thus instructed them in the notions they ought to entertain of the paternal regard of their heavenly Father, from the beginning, he gives a *sensible proof* of that Providence, by a miracle, exactly adapted to the *actual state* of their wants; by which they would be immediately led to consider, that they were not only to admire the work, not merely to exercise their wonder and astonishment, but to be grateful, at all times, for the superintending favour of the Almighty, whom they would easily understand to be able to assist and succour them, from their experience of this undeniable exertion of his power.

Had the miracle been performed without the previous exhortation, it might have excited their amazement, or, perhaps, have passed off in the simple satisfaction of the appetite, as the casual benefactions of men often do; and which, by the way, you may see was the case with some of the very persons whom he had fed on this occasion; for, in the 26th verse, he says to them—"Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracle, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Which, by a paraphrase, will prove and exemplify the very argument I have been insisting upon. You do

do not follow me on account of my discourses, opening the eyes of your understanding, giving you new and great information, concerning yourselves and futurity. You do not shew gratitude to my Father, who hath sent me into the world to manifest both his goodness and power, and hath now exhibited an extraordinary instance of it ; but your object is selfish and carnal, destitute of every motive which ought to inspire you. And that this is the ordinary effect of all divine blessings, and also of all the tender attentions of pious and well-meaning Christians to their unfortunate fellow creatures, is too notorious to be disputed. Some from ignorance, some from inconsiderateness, and some from brutality, look no further than the immediate use of the gift, thoughtless and thankless to the divine love, which is the fountain of every thing we receive and enjoy.

Upon this ground we can account for it, that there is so much infidelity, so much wickedness, in the world. How can men understand the goodness of *spiritual* favours, if they comprehend not the duty of gratitude for those which are temporal ? If the incarnation of the Son of God, his death and passion, his resurrection, which are greater miracles

cles than that of the loaves and fishes, be not understood, and believed to have proceeded from the most unbounded efforts of heavenly affection, they will have no more influence upon men than any events in which they are not interested. Grievous as it is to the thought, a crucified Jesus, in all the agony of the most cruel tortures, is as little an object of concern to an unenlightened man, as a picture of the imagination.

What an obligation, then, lies upon those who *can* instruct the foolish, to afford them the means of being wise unto salvation? How can the Scriptures be read or heard to any purpose, if the foundations of faith be not laid in the belief of a God and revelation? How can the redemption by Christ be comprehended, as to its necessity; by *whom* it was effected; what was the manner, and what are to be the consequences of it; if men are not first taught that they are, from their very nature, sinful; that the wrath of God would have endured, and condemned all the world, had his justice not been satisfied by the atonement made by his own Son, who came down from Heaven, assumed our nature, and suffered for us? So that our Lord very justly "had compassion upon the multitude," for their entire ignorance of their own

own condition, of the intent of his coming, and the dignity of his person ; of the love, and the no less astonishing mercy, of God. He was under a kind of necessity to *prepare* them, by the explanation of these things, *prior* to the extraordinary work of the miracle, which was designed to *confirm* them, and visibly to prove, that he who thus spoke to them was more than man, and that his doctrines were truth. Neither is the situation of a great part of mankind different at this hour, in point of ignorance, from that of Christ's auditory. The same method, therefore must be pursued to bring them out of darkness into his marvellous light, or the standing evidence of miracles will be a vain support of revelation.

I have entered into this long discussion of observations upon the gospel before us, that I might persuade you to the performance of a duty, which is certainly incumbent upon all. There is, however, another special inference, which I think arises out of this history ; and that is, an assurance that those who hear the word with joy, and desire the knowledge which cometh from above, will so commend themselves to the providential care of him whom they seek, that he will never desert them.—“ I have been young, and now

now am old," saith David, " yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, or his seed begging their bread." Our Saviour worked the miracle for those who had " come from far" to hear him, *and who had remained with him*; and we ourselves shew our confidence in this same regard for us, when we pray for our daily bread. To which, permit me to add, that the action of giving thanks for it, upon every occasion, at our tables, not with levity, and as mere form, but with the heart lifted up in sincerity, though it be a slight return for his bounty, does shew, and does promote, an habitual acknowledgement of his constant goodness; the frequent repetition of which may be some little means of preserving the sense of God's presence in our minds.

The last circumstance which I shall advert to on this opportunity, is the command of our Lord—" Gather up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost." The admonition occurs, as I recollect, in no other parts of Scripture, except where Christ miraculously provides for the *bodily* wants of men; and it shews, what some persons would be unwilling to admit, that frugality is a Christian virtue. We know that extravagance and dissipation are crimes, from their ruinous consequences; but there

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are those who are apt to despise œconomy, as unworthy of a liberal spirit, and waste that superfluity which they do not use themselves. Here, from the highest authority, we have a contrary doctrine; and when considered, it is perfectly agreeable to the tenor of all other the divine precepts. God hath bestowed upon us abundance to a good end, and not to be abused. He has not said, eat, drink, and be filled, and throw the fragments to the dogs; but he has taught us, by the plenty of some, to remember the indigence of others; and rather tried and proved us, by his superabundant gifts, whether we have a feeling for the wants of others, as he has for ours. Whatsoever is saved from immediate necessity may be laid up for future exigencies; for if it be cast away, it is in some degree a contempt of the benefit, and a temptation of the Lord, by expecting that he will daily give us more and more, though we have already received too much, and have misused it.

There is something more substantial in this reflection than appears at the first glance, and if we seriously attend to the result of it, we shall discover one important lesson—that as the great and good Author of every human blessing, has neither made nor ordered any one thing

in his creation to be useless or vain ; as he has certainly intended a place and purpose for the most minute objects, we should consider, that whatever part of that system is committed to our management, it should be disposed of, according to our power, in imitation of his perfect will, and in subservience to his designs.

Referring to these arguments, I conclude with this short exhortation. Read the word, and hear with attention ; meditate upon it ; and be assured, the more strictly you examine the Scriptures, the more duties you will find incumbent on yourselves ; the more you will admire and glorify the works of your Father which is in Heaven.

END OF DISCOURSE XI.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XII.

ST. LUKE, CHAP. V. VER. 8.

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at
Jesus's Feet, saying, Depart from me,
for I am a sinful Man, O Lord.*

THE selections from Scripture appointed for the public service of the church, are intended to instruct us, and to confirm the faith of believers. They are to Christian congregations at this day, what the reading and explanation of the law of Moses and the Prophets was to the Jews, which was upon all solemn festivals the office of their priests, to remind them of the wonderful works of God, of their own special deliverances from all their enemies, of the blessings conferred upon them, of the duties to which they were bound by the express ordinances of their ~~inspired~~ lawgiver; and to inspire that gratitude and love to their divine benefactor, which leads to obedience.

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The object of our Saviour's life was to the same great purpose ; asserting, in the first place, that he was sent from God according to the prophecies concerning him, and proving the truth of that assertion by signs and wonders and supernatural works, beyond all that Moses and those that had followed him in the spirit and power of the Almighty, had ever performed. We find in the chapter from whence the text is taken, that when the multitude pressed upon him to hear the word of God he entered into a ship, pushed out a little from the land, and brought them from thence. It should seem from the context that his discourse was of himself, of the salvation which was to be wrought by him, that he was the expected deliverer, and that in him the promises were to be fulfilled through repentance from sin. In confirmation of which doctrine, he performs the miracle before us ; for the prejudices of the Jews were inveterate, and except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe.

This obstinate disposition is the great charge against them, it is their condemnation, it is their reproach, and yet we know there are those among ourselves even in this mature age of Christianity,

who give no credence to his word or to his miracles, who would ridicule the exclamation of St. Peter, and affect to be surprised that he should be astonished at a circumstance, which in the ordinary course of things, is of every days experience. It is indeed true, that the occurrences and events which continually present themselves to us, some, in which we are individually concerned, are almost as great instances of the power and goodness of God, as was this of the draft of fishes: but it does not follow from thence, that we are to overlook or slight them as mere common casual appearances of the operations of nature, or the usual consequences of human industry: for the Scripture, to whose authority good men will not object, and bad men cannot form any just objection, declares the contrary. The whole therefore that in the one case or the other can be admitted, is this, that the Jews were infidels from a constitutional or national hardness of heart and temper of rebellion, and that the unbelievers, at present, are sceptics, partly from fashion, and real ignorance, partly from pride, which will not permit them to acknowledge what they have once denied, and from fear, lest the confession of being convinced

vinced should condemn their practices.

I shall raise an argument upon this proposition which may be of service to us all ; first taking into consideration the meaning of St. Peter's words, which may be paraphrased in this or the like manner. O Lord, I have let down the net at thy command, not expecting that any good effects would ensue, because we, who are fishermen, and know our business, have toiled all night and caught nothing ; now seeing beyond all hope, our nets so full that they even break with the weight of our draught, I am ashamed at my distrust of thy capacity, to give what human industry could not bestow, I confess my sinfulness, and that I am unworthy to approach so much goodness and such astonishing power.

Three things are here observable, which coming to pass almost always in the general course of worldly affairs, are fairly applicable to every man's consideration. First, that for the most part we trust entirely to our own proper abilities for the accomplishment of our designs. Secondly, that we do not ask for or expect, and much less depend upon the interposition of Providence, and thirdly, that when we see our success, or our escape from evil, evidently owing to the

hand of God, we are astonished, and confounded at the greatness of the deed and our own want of confidence in him. Whoever reflects upon the form of education by which youth is trained up, will observe, with concern perhaps, but certainly with some degree of disgust, that the end of it is *gain*. Every art, mystery and profession looks to their grand object, the bodily strength and the mental accomplishments, the labour, genius, learning of mankind, are all bent the same way, and have but one single scope, call it by what name you will, and that is *gain*. Now as this is a temporal blessing, it is natural enough that mere human effort should be supposed competent to the obtaining it. The many examples of successful industry, diligence and study before our eyes prompt us to pursue the track in which others have so fortunately trodden, and the idea is so strongly supported, that a failure is not considered among the probabilities of life. Added to this, the pride and self conceit incident to us (possibly by our natural corruption, though certainly not made for man) push on the vigour of our inclinations, and cause every difficulty to vanish before our hopeful exertions. Ambition and emulation are the theme of parents and preceptors to those designed

signed for the highest scenes and stations : diligence, attention and carefulness, to others ; but idleness and inactivity are held out as the bane and destruction of every man's good fortune ; the system is laudable if its foundation and super-structure be sound : but if, as it generally comes to pass, the little morality and sense of religion imbibed in childhood, be extinguished, or at best laid asleep, when the mature man begins to act his part upon the stage of life, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he will look upon himself as the maker of his own fortune, and will also accomplish that point by any means whatsoever. Hence it is that cunning and artifice, and deceit and falsehood, every mean and unworthy engine which can be employed to advantage have place in the formation of some men's schemes, and to speak plainly, according to the manners of the world, are thought necessary to all. It is idle to talk of certain professions or occupations being more tinctured with evil or base principles than others, for if the notion prevails, as it does certainly prevail, that success results rather from our ability than from our virtue, every one will commit himself to that guide or that supporter which popular opinion informs him, is most favourable to his views ;

and from the highest to the lowest stations in the world, the same vices, if esteemed *useful*, will be found under distinct denominations, and with different aggravations. For one great reason why men depend entirely upon themselves, and rest upon their own proper ingenuity or activity, is, because among those of their species they see such is the practice ; it strikes them, that the affairs of the world belong solely to the province of human capacities, and that as the earth would lie desolate without cultivation by man, so every other thing must apply to the same management and direction. But this is the most unlucky analogy that could be adduced in favour of their argument, for the earth was cursed with sterility for the disobedience of man, and his labour is his punishment. Besides, let him toil as he will, it is God that giveth the increase.

But the powerful motive by which men are led to imagine that their own force or wit is *alone* to be depended upon, arises from a sort of conviction, that any dependence invisible and spiritual support would be so far from assisting them, that the indulgence of a notion so vain and chimerical would repress their own activity, and counteract their operations. For they reason in this manner—

ner—I know what I am able to do myself, I am not so sure of any other aid, nay, I do not know that any Superior Power concerns itself with these my actions, and I will not commit myself to an uncertainty. It may also be observed in the transactions which pass before us, that there is a strong prejudice of the world against those of a contrary opinion; against those who rely upon the Divine Blessing and Providence; they are stigmatized as hypocrites and puritans, who conceal their own love of indolence and inactivity under the cloak of religious resignation, and an opposition is raised against their honest endeavours, as if they were introducing a new and dangerous opinion, and would turn things upside down; then all their failures and ill-successes are ridiculed, as derived from an absurd visionary presumption upon their own holiness, rather than upon their abilities and exertions.

By the encouragement of these and similar notions, which accord best with the outward and visible condition of human affairs, it comes to pass, as I observed in the second place, that we do not *expect* or *desire* the assistance of God in our worldly concerns. It was an idea of some of the heathens, that their gods did not interest themselves in the *ordinary*

nary course of things below; from whence it followed, that they believed every thing possible to a brave and wise man; that a blind and fickle fortune, or, as some held, an irreversible fatality, dispos'd all sublunary events. Whence I cannot but suspect, when we hear so much of *good and bad luck*, in the continual conversation of those about us, that this sentiment is at present adopted among ourselves. For men to entertain expectations from a Being which careth not for them, would be irrational; much more so would it be, if they doubted of his existence, his power, or his goodness. However difficult it may be, to suppose that there are any who carry their scepticism so far, ~~and~~ yet certainly there are many who act as if they disbelieved both in God and his attributes.

But, to pass over so odious a discussion, we may, without offence, enlarge a little upon a point which relates much to our subject, and that is the question of a *particular Providence*. Understanding this proposition in its extent, it takes in a watchfulness, care, and direction, too, of the Divine Author, extended to every single act and thought of every individual being of his creation, which is so large a comprehension, as to induce an absurdity; for it would abridge the free

free will of man, and make God either the author of evil, or at least the permitter of it. Though he sees and knows all that passes on the earth (some possibly will not admit so much) yet we may not infer a conclusion from thence, that he interposes *immediately in every business* of the world. Upon this distinction it is, that those who think they have no *right* to expect the interference of Providence in their concerns, build the principal objection. Some actions, (they say) are in their nature *indifferent*, and have neither good nor evil in them, though such are very few indeed ; others respect objects (as they suppose) *unworthy* the Divine notice ; others belong to their *private* affairs ; others regard only the laws of their country ; others, still, *have a common routine*, the management and issue of them has been *always* the same, with due attention ; and thus, upon some pretext or other, they shut God out of their dependencies, and do not expect to be assisted by him.

But a particular providence, in its just acceptation, depends upon God's own word, that he will never leave or forsake those who faithfully serve him, and with confidence in his truth rely upon him. He has no where declared, that he will serve any man ^{no}~~any~~ ambition, or avarice, or lust,

lust, or revenge, though he has sometimes made the passions, and even the outrages of men, the instruments of his justice and mercy. But as these are the grand ends of human wishes, if he gives no sanction to such attainments, a great part of mankind are but too ready to think they have nothing to expect from him. His will does not correspond with their desires, therefore there can be no connection between them, in regard to those things which *alone they esteem valuable.*

It may be understood, therefore, that there are some cases in which Providence does specially interpose, and others, in which it leaves men to their own inventions, and the consequences of them. Thus the preservation of Moses for the delivery of the law ; and the designation of Cyrus for the restoration of the Temple, and the worship of God in truth and holiness ; and some events which have happened in later periods of history, may fairly be attributed to that cause, and can hardly be accounted for otherwise. Many particular circumstances in the lives of different men, and some perhaps experienced by ourselves, support the same notion ; but one general rule *must govern through the whole argument, viz. that we cannot hope for the*

the aid of Providence, except we ask for it with faith, except we request that which is just and virtuous, and except our conduct be such as in some degree may entitle us to his favour. Perhaps there is no instance in which every man may more justly apply the particular care of Providence to his own case, than in the power, means, and opportunity, which he has given to every single person, of obtaining for himself, by reasonable diligence, the necessary comforts and conveniences of life ; which is what the Scriptures (as I conceive) mean by the expression of our daily bread.

It is usual to overlook this circumstance, or to refer it to the general superintendance of the Almighty. But as, in the providing these blessings, every one acts independently, and for himself, he may reasonably apply the beneficence of Heaven distinctively and personally. Besides, the peculiar situations of different men requiring different provisions, that very variety is a proof, that each by himself is the peculiar subject of a particular regard. To those who do not acknowledge the dependent, and naturally almost helpless condition of humanity, this may appear a pious refinement, to be received only by weak and vulgar minds. Vulgar as it may be, I wish it were

were somewhat more common, for such a persuasion is the greatest comfort, support, and encouragement, that the mind is capable of. It takes off the load from man, who is unable to bear it, and throws every care upon God, who has commanded us to do so. With more difficulty will it be accepted, that the spirit of God is with every single man who diligently seeks him. Sometimes to impel, sometimes to restrain ; to guide and govern his thoughts and actions ; and yet there is no truth more sacred than this, that the grace of God hath appeared unto all men, that whoever commits himself to it shall never fall, and whoever fights against it can never prosper. It is, indeed, so transcendant a gift, that, except in short intervals of occasional emotion, some men cannot bring themselves to think of it ; *expect* it they cannot, because of their unbelief.

But I have said, that mankind does not even *desire* the intervention of Providence in their concerns. This is owing to another principle—to pride, to the high conceit of themselves, which pervades the world. The lofty ideas which are formed of human abilities, the high sounding terms which are applied to man's nature, and the almost divine conceptions which are formed of his elevated station in

in the scale of beings, swells up the creature into an imaginary independence, and perverts his understanding so compleatly, that he begins to think he stands in no need of his Creator, that he can act his part without him, and therefore will not submit to owe any thing to another (even to God) which he can procure by himself. The effects of this temper are so extraordinary, as to be almost incredible, did we not so frequently witness the extravagant flights of vanity and presumption, which, like the giants of fable, despise and contend with Heaven itself, in the heighth of their insanity. Before I close this part of the subject, I will just add, that the hasty and passionate man is most subject to be carried away into this species of rebellion. His violence will not permit him to reflect; and this was the very case of St. Peter, from whose conduct, always forward, and prompted by an irritable disposition, we have ventured to make these general deductions.

But, lastly, we are to explain, why, in a crisis of *special* Providence, men should be astonished. "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" sudden and unexpected occurrences are naturally the causes of involuntary emotions, and the exclamations which break forth
are

are descriptive of the sensations of the soul at that instant. You may discover whether the man be good or evil in such paroxysms. The religious will utter some pious ejaculation ; the wicked will utter his fear, or his rebellion, or as it were, his disappointment. But in all cases, the surprize arises from the want or suppression of that habitual sense of God's presence, which is with us in the most trivial actions of our lives. When some are miraculously preserved, and others as wonderfully overtaken by sudden and unforeseen punishments, why should we be so struck and aghast at the event ? Is not the Avenger and the Saviour at our right hand ? If the common and profane swearer is snatched away in a moment, in the midst of his execrations, should it seem so very wonderful, that the affronted majesty of God doth execute instant judgment on such wickedness ? or, rather, ought it not more to amaze us, that the long suffering of his mercy should endure and hold out against such flagrant provocation ? If the poor and needy, the oppressed and distressed, are, without any visible cause, lifted up at once, the face of misery brightened, and its enemies trodden down, would there be such extreme cause for amazement, did we constantly ponder upon the

the power and the goodness of God ? It is therefore the absence of this consideration which occasions all that alarm and perturbation, expressed by momentary effusions of joy or confusion. It was clearly the case of St. Peter, though an apostle ; for we may observe, that in the first part of this transaction, he calls our Saviour only MASTER ; he obeys him in letting down the net, as a servant executes the will of his superior ; but when he saw the signal and unexpected success of the draught, he falls down at his feet, and, addressing him as *his Lord*, acknowledges *his divinity*, and confesses his own unworthiness.

In fact, the holy Scripture is full of unforeseen turns and changes in the fortunes of men, effected by the immediate interposition of Providence. Nay, even at this day, human life, and the course of affairs, is full of them. I am myself so prepossessed with the opinion, that God neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, that he is every where, and in every thing, that when I hear of an extraordinarily wicked man, I hourly expect, with horror, some calamity to overtake him ; and from the same principle, I never despair for the humble and the good, even in the extremity of temporal afflictions, and anticipate their relief by some special

special exercise of divine favor. " I have been young, and now am old, yet saw I never the righteous utterly forsaken." " I have also seen the wicked in great prosperity, and flourishing like a green bay tree ; again I looked, and behold he was gone, and the place of him was no where to be found." There are some who would call this superstition, and others would ridicule it as cowardice and imbecility of mind ; but sure I am, that the two pillars of happiness, here and for futurity, are, religious fear, and religious confidence. The effect of them is to carry our thoughts, in all our actions and intentions, to Heaven ; to ask for counsel and assistance from thence, and if it *does* make us always rather serious than idle and frivolous, I confess, I do not see the inconvenience of it. It indeed, true, that the vigor of youth, the activity of health, the pride of prosperity, will not relish this lesson ; but the best and the happiest men that we have heard of, were early trained to this system. Addison, among laymen ; Bishops Beveridge, and Secker, among the divines, were strong supporters of it. But what is more, there is not one of ourselves but is *occasionally* ready to adopt this doctrine, and we may be assured, that

that there will come a time when we shall receive satisfaction from no other.

These are the reflections which have presented themselves to me in my meditations, upon the gospel before us. And the substance of them is shortly this, that if we rely only upon our own exertions, we shall be generally disappointed, even in regard to those things, which seem most in our hands; but that on the contrary, if we resign ourselves up to God, if we are not too high minded to confide in his Providence, we shall always receive comfort and support from that Almighty Power, which alone can produce strength out of weakness.

END OF DISCOURSE XII.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XIII.

ST. JAMES, Chap. I. Ver. 22.

*Be ye Doers of the Word, and not Hearers
only, deceiving your own selves.*

THE whole Epistle of St. James, from whence these words are taken, may be considered as a practical discourse, addressed to all Christians: it is so plain and intelligible, as to be fitted to every capacity, and so comprehensive, as to include almost every man's particular case and situation. The original design with which it was penned, was to correct an opinion, entertained by some men of *those days*, and which *still* subsists, that bare unfruitful faith, the simple confession of Christ, and trust in his merits and satisfaction, was of itself sufficient to Salvation, even though a man should fail in every other part of Christianity: a doctrine which St. Paul did *not* preach, though it be imputed to him; for the substance of his argument, in the Epistle to the Romans, goes no further than to make

make faith the ground-work, or principle of action, and to shew, against the Jews, that the ceremonial law, though strictly observed, could not take away sin ; but on the contrary that a belief in Christ, and entering into covenant with him, was the primary, and indispensable condition of redemption ; which however *might be forfeited*, if *after baptism*, which was the confession of their faith, and the *consideration* upon which their former iniquities were pardoned, (which is else where called their regeneration) they should *return* to those sins, which God, for the sake of his Son had pardoned ; he having declared, that he accepted them (though sinners) on account of his wrath against sin being *satisfied* by the expiation for it, made *once* for all, by the death of Christ upon the cross. So that this faith did *not* deliver them from *future* condemnation, should they *relapse* into the sins which their baptism had released them from ; neither was there any promise to that purpose : which is not in fact different from the teaching of St. James, or indeed to that expression of Jesus himself “ why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the words which I say ? ” We collect therefore from this deduction, that religion does not merely consist in believing, hearing, assenting to,

or rejoicing in the glorious and comforting truths of the gospel; but in the *performance* of those duties it enjoins, in abstaining from those vices and crimes which it *forbids*; and briefly in joining the *life*, to the *name* and *faith* of a Christian.

The Apostle, by a striking comparison, illustrates the character we are speaking of: "If any be an *hearer* of the word, and not a *doer*, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." To which description I would join only a few words, by way of admonition; that if those persons who so frequently and devoutly admire their own persons in their looking glass, would as often, and with equal attention, contemplate themselves in that mirror, which the scripture holds up to them, they would refresh their memories, to a better end, and to greater advantage.

It is indeed, as I suppose, with this design, that we assemble in this place on the Sabbath Day; to hear the word of God read to us and explained: if we do not come with such intentions, we are hypocrites and time servers; and still, if we *do* listen for a while, and forget afterwards the advice we have received,

received, so as to neglect or to dis obey it, we are unprofitable servants. In the affairs of the world, no man asks counsel but with a view to be governed by it; no man studies but with the hope of being improved in wisdom; no man binds himself to an art, trade, or mystery but with the expectation of future interest, from what he learns, and a fixed determination to pursue that interest, by means of the knowledge he has gained. In all these cases, there is an active *application* of our instruction, to the offices of human life: but how stands the matter as to those things, which do not so *immediately*, and so *entirely* concern this world as another? We *ask* and we *receive* counsel from God, either by reading his word, or hearkening to his ministers: and the end *principally* proposed, is this, that we should be taught his laws, and how we are to please him: we *bind* ourselves to Christ, by as strict obligations as any we can use in our earthly concerns, to *learn of him* the way and the precepts of Salvation; and our profession is, to follow his example, to imitate his conduct and manners, as *our master* and *guide*, in the art or mystery of godliness. And so far the similitude between spiritual and worldly concerns is preserved; we give our

minds and our attention to both ; but it is permanent as to the one, and occasional only, or transient in respect to the other. As to the first, we carry our knowledge into *effect* ; as to the second, we throw away our knowledge, because we do not *act* up to it, and forfeit the benefits of our engagements, because we desert our occupation, or do not strenuously exercise ourselves in it. I presume every man will agree, that if he has taken all possible care in the case of a son, to have him well educated in science, or well brought up in business, at a great expence, under the most capable instructors, and the youth should afterwards become idle and dissolute, though perfectly skilled in all the parts of his vocation, that there would be just cause for complaint, that the father's money, and his pains were thrown away. Why should there not be the same reason to lament the loss of a *religious* education, when persons trained up regularly in the fear of God, and taught to regard his laws, become profligate and abandoned ? The difference between the two instances, is this only, that in the one, he falls short of the advantages of life ; in the other, he loses his soul ; but in both, the *crime* is the same, it is hearing and not doing, or

or rather doing contrary to what has been taught.

From the importance of this consideration, it might be supposed, that there were some superlatively great benefit in view, which mankind were carried away with, and which would excuse their omission to do what they know to be right. But this is not so, for there is no worldly profit or gratification inconsistent with the word of God, which is not equally inconsistent with sound reason. I attribute therefore some transgressions to the immediate impulse of the passions, and the more light deviations from the law of righteousness, to an *imperfect* attention to what is heard: in regard to the *flagrant* enormities which we witness, they are owing, I fear, to an *entire ignorance* of God, or the total absence of his grace, and can be no otherwie accounted for. Thus, in adultery, the passion of lust, may by some sudden temptation, draw even a virtuous man into a breach of that commandment which he had often heard with veneration: a *careless* hearer may not give due honor to his parents, or he may inadvertently covet other men's goods; because he has been a flight or negligent observer, and thinketh not of the evil: but in murder, robbery, or perjury, no *passion* is

is concerned, and they cannot well be committed by any other, than a man of a corrupt, insensible, and unbelieving mind : there is no *excuse* deducible from these reflections, but rather an admonition, pointing out to us what we are to guard against, what enemies we have to contend with, and what a dreadful condition it is to be ignorant of what we might, and ought to know, by not hearing at all.

The leading qualification necessary to hear to *good purpose*, is seriousness : from which nevertheless men are more averse, than from any other disposition, because some confound it with melancholy, and others with moroseness. But a serious affection means only, a steady, fixed, thinking state of mind, which receives deeply the impression of great and important objects, and retains it for ever,

The *nature* of God, eternal, invisible, especially if contrasted with the finite and imperfect nature of man, is a most sublime subject, and cannot be thought of, but with the most profound reverence : the *power* and *goodness* of God, in creating all things out of nothing, and daily sustaining and protecting his creatures by supernatural means, must always astonish and confound us : the wonderful *redemption* of mankind, by an unbounded mercy,

mercy, by an unfathomable mysterious process, and the miraculous proofs of a future state of being, are such stupendous exertions of love and omnipotence, as almost to baffle comprehension: yet we *must* entertain these mighty objects, we *must* consider, we *must* meditate upon them, and we *must live* according to the thoughts they suggest to us. If such considerations do not sink into our hearts, we cannot love God, nor fear him, because the idea of his attributes is absent from us; and we cannot continue in that respect and affection which are necessary to direct and govern our wills, unless we dwell upon the infinity, first cause, and all his works. A serious man only, can therefore contemplate these things with effect, from which all our obedience, and all our hopes are derived. For as St. Paul says, hearing is vain, preaching is vain, nay, faith itself is vain, unless we look further than the mere scene that is before us: unless with the eye of our mind, we see God sitting upon his throne, and commanding order to spring out of confusion; unless we hear him from the midst of the fire, amidst thunderings and lightnings, delivering his laws, and denouncing his judgments; unless the sufferings of Christ, the Son of God, for our sakes; his body torn

torn and tortured, his resurrection, his ascension, be as full in our view, as if we had seen them with our mortal eyes. What is the moral law of the two tables, without this addition to its authority? It is no more surely, than the statutes of a temporal prince or government, the submission to which is for our convenience, and the breach of which is punished in this world only? What is the gospel, but the sacrifices of a friend, the advice of a wise man, or at most, the dying for a whole nation, as some Heathens are recorded in history to have done for their people? But when we raise our thoughts to heaven, and the power and glory, and mightiness of that kingdom, takes possession of us; then, hearing the wisdom which is from above, and considering that we are mere dust and worms in comparison of God, our obedience flows from our conviction, and we feel the obligation of doing his will, or the necessity of incurring his judgments. Again, as to the new covenant; when we look upon the whole world, standing condemned before its Maker, without possibility of escape from his wrath, without hope, without plea of defence, or excuse, why it should not be consumed in a moment; and on a sudden, behold the sacrifice lifted up, and

and instantly hear the pardon of all the nations of the earth pronounced, in a strain not less sublime than the creation of light. What sensations enter into our souls? Hear O ye inhabitants of the world! the lamb of God is slain, and ye are forgiven! can the idle and the negligent appreciate this love, this mercy, this omnipotence? Will the giddy and the gay lay it to their bosoms; and when vice and vanity allure them, will they start from their joys, and say, Christ died for me, I will not crucify him afresh, by my sins? Much less will he say, Christ who saved me from sin, the same shall be my judge, for this very sin which I am tempted to commit. It is, then, I repeat it, a serious, stedfast, solid mind only, that can use these reflections, and habitually act under their influence.

In this place, an objection arises, that seriousness is constitutional, and has no merit; that levity and carelessness are also constitutional, and are no crimes: but I answer, that some diseases are constitutional, yet we attempt by medicine, to correct, or to eradicate them; why not treat the disorders or weaknesses of the mind, as we do those of the body? Every one will allow, that the effect ceases with the cause; and in the case before us, our argument is against the cause

cause of all actions which spring from *an imperfect attention* to God, and his word, the *effect* being plain enough in an imperfect obedience to them. Besides, how do these thoughtless hearers comfort themselves, in sickness, in trouble, under the accidents and casualties of life? why, they become suddenly serious, because all the follies and lusts, which administered to their carelessness and gay inattention are shut out: nay, at that season, they would not entertain them if they could; for they begin to look back with regret, and forward with fear: where is then the excuse for constitutional levity? it is overcome by compulsion; which proves, that the *will* went with the *natural propensity*, and that there was no attempt to controul it by a serious consideration of the precepts of religion, and of course, they did not perform those duties, the recital, and recommendation of which, they had heard with indifference. Hence appears, the absolute necessity of being a serious hearer, *at one time or other of our lives*; and if it *will come*, as inevitably as sickness, old age, and death itself, surely it is better to be taken up with a good will, than by being *forced* upon us: the consequences too will be more beneficial; for if we hear the word with observation, we shall conform

conform our actions to it with greater sincerity and ease.

But to impress these observations more forcibly, let us direct them to the too common conduct of many persons, who come professedly to the house of God, to pray, and to hear his commandments, and the preaching of the gospel. We there confess our sins committed, and duties unperformed; we promise repentance, and we intreat for absolution, which is pronounced by God's permission, to the penitent; yet, in a few hours, we commit the *same* sins, we fail in the *same* neglects which we had confessed, which we had repented of, which had been forgiven. In the fashionable world, men go from the church, to a concert, and some to the gaming table. In the ranks of inferiority, one hour is given to God, and the rest to visits and festivity. Our *ancestors* of rank and fortune spent the Sabbath *otherwise*, they at least remembered what they had heard for the *whole* day, and consecrated it by reading holy books, and instructing their dependents: yet this age is said to stand upon the shoulders of the last, and to have improved by their communications: I am very apprehensive, this, our elevation does not place *us* nearer to heaven than *they* were. To what *use* do we now purpose

purpose is it, that the gospel is read to us, in which the judgment of God is denounced against whoremongers, adulterers, drunkards, covetous persons ; or discourses delivered to the same effect, if those who hear with their outward ears, immediately after the admonition, fall into the crime ? drunkenness, in truth, seems more frequent, at least more notorious on the Sabbath Day, than on any other day, which shews, that men have as little shame as sensibility. The offence of swearing follows close upon this vice, or accompanies it, and the very person who had just listened to the prohibition, takes the name of God in vain, as unconcernedly, as if the law was unknown to him.

From these considerations, we collect, that all external forms of religion, are of no value, unless they are substantialized by practice. " Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, says St. James, *deceiving your own selves*, which he afterwards terms, *deceiving your own souls:*" a conclusion truly tremendous ! It were better for a man to be ignorant, than having been informed, to disobey ; it is mockery and it is perdition : he knew his master's will, and did it not, therefore shall he beaten with many stripes, says the scripture ; he visibly is God's servant,

servant, but really his enemy : he in the sight of men, affects to regard his soul, but destroys it. This is the strongest possible reason for seriousness and sincerity, because it regards the highest possible interest of man.

There is no emotion of the mind or body, without some predisposing inclination, and some determined end. When we read, when we hear therefore, there must be a meaning appropriated to such exercise of our faculties ; and in a matter of real consequence, such as religion, the intent must be either to be instructed, or to augment that knowledge we possessed before. But if we *stop there*, the very information we obtain is useless. It is to plant a tree, and gather *no* fruit from it; or the fruit, if *produced*, may be bitter and poisonous, and the land which beareth it be accursed. It is indeed surprising, that men should give themselves the *trouble* of learning wisdom, and bring it to no account, for folly itself could do neither worse, nor less. “ To the ungodly faith God, why dost thou teach my law, and takest my covenant in thy mouth, whereas thou hatest to be reformed, and has cast my words behind thee.” These words of David exactly describe the deceiver of his own soul, to which I shall add only the denunciation of the

the gospel : now is the axe laid to the root of the tree : every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

END OF DISCOURSE XIII.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XIV.

1 COR. Chap. X. Ver. 12.

Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take Heed, lest he fall.

THERE are two maxims generally current in the world, which seem both of them true, and yet are opposite to each other. One is, that those who are most confident, are most likely to fail in their attempts; the other, that *without* confidence, no one ever accomplishes the completion of his wishes. He who boldly presumes upon his own abilities, is actuated to incur great risks; and on the contrary, the exercise of much prudence, induces delay, inactivity, and disappointment. The two sides are taken according to the *tempers* of men, and not from sound reason; for neither the one opinion or the other is *universally* just, but must be governed by circumstances, and proved by events. The bold and resolute derive honor even from the ill success of a glorious enter-

prize; and the cautious or cold possess this consolation in their management, that they have run into no danger, and though they have fallen short of their object, they have suffered no injury. These notions, as applied to the course of human affairs, are ordinarily adopted by mankind; they are fit for that scene, where the counsels of man are useful, and supposed to be, the only useful wisdom. Success in the things of this world, *does* depend, either upon activity, or circumspection; and the state of the universe, if taken in one view, would probably present two general conditions to our notice; viz. of those who have gained *something* by their energy, and of others who have lost *nothing* through the effect of carefulness. The first of these obtains public admiration, and applause; the latter is wrapped up in obscurity, and complacent retirement. You will however observe, at the same time, that neither virtue nor religion are *necessarily* engaged to produce either of these consequences, resulting from human policy; for one may shine, without possessing a single good principle, and another may be eclipsed from no other cause than timidity, or indolence. The passions, interests, or other gratifications of men, are solely concerned; their range is not beyond temporal

temporal things ; their merit is attributed to human judgment, operating upon natural impulse, or the opinion of the world ; there is nothing in them which respects the *duties* of man, as a rational agent, accountable to a superior and invisible being : for these *duties* depend upon his positive law, which is the law of human conduct, independent of any wordly rules, drawn from the wisdom of our equals, or the practical knowledge of men, however experienced. Such wisdom answers well enough to the purposes of an heathen unenlightened state, but becomes foolishness, under the light of revelation ; since, as soon as we understand that all earthly attainments are unworthy our pursuit, and that the desire of them is frequently sinful ; discussion is at an end, whether this or that method be the most favorable to our purpose, because the things themselves are indifferent to a Christian. Whether a man as to this world is exalted, or depressed, whether he carries his point by spirited exertions, or loses his aim by too cautious advances, is of no consequence ; for the manner of proceeding and the subject to which it is directed are on the same footing, equally unimportant, and vain.

The following reflections are intended for the advan-

advantages of such persons as are extremely solicitous about a *rule of action*, and apply to the world for it; which can give them no other than that which belongs to itself: worldly rules may occasion to us much vexation and trouble, but in their effects can go no further than their causes; which, springing out of things transitory and mortal, must *there* terminate. I have also thus far offered these questions, because some imagine, that the gospel doctrines do allude or apply, in some degree, to the behaviour we are to practice, and to the manner in which we should conduct ourselves to the greatest advantage in society, without regard to the *great scope*, and end of those doctrines; as if in fact, the apostle only argued like a philosopher, or a man of the world; and we were to profit by his advice, for the prosperous issue of many wishes, and the indulgence of many appetites; which are indeed things esteemed and sought after, by careless or worldly minded men, but which stand in contradiction to the divine tenor of Christ's precepts. Now the words in the text are of this kind; they have been understood to recommend the cautious and prudent way of passing through life, and to decide with authority against the bold and adventurous spirit,

spirit, which overlooks dangers in its pursuit : and were the words found in an heathen moralist, they would be good advice to that purpose ; but *here* they have a more extensive meaning, and a more sublime design. The counsel here given by St. Paul, does not respect mankind for the sake of *this* world, but *another* : he does not point out to them the precipice which threatens ambition, the secret dagger which awaits upon power, the elements which flatter the mariner to his destruction, or the death which hovers in secret over the robust : he does not say to his followers, retire to the valley, fly from the hurricane, and be secure ; but this is Christ's doctrine, by the mouth of this apostle, to the Gentiles ; we all are subject to the law of God, as our governor, and exist under his constant providence ; he delivers us continually from dangers, and we daily and hourly are sensible of his goodness and mercy ; yet, amidst all the obedience we profess, all the acknowledgments we are ready to make under such impressions, we are liable to fall away, and to be ungrateful ; to *murmur* and *rebel* against him, as did the Israelites in the wilderness ; whose sins and whose punishment are recorded and delivered down to us, as examples, and

for our admonition : " wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall."

It is stedfastness then in *religious principles*, and the duties which flow from them, which is the object of our care, and vigilance ; in which we cannot be too strict, because the dangers are so many. The foundation of every religion must be faith in the author of it, in his doctrines, and his promises ; but since this does not solely depend upon the will, but upon conviction, which is communicated through the understanding, the most pious and well disposed man may be unsettled by the subtleties of a more able disputer than himself. The desire of knowledge, the love of truth itself, may betray us ; for we may study and enquire, and examine, and raise one doubt upon another, without end, till we confuse ourselves in a maze of difficulties. Neither does the most profound learning, or the purest intention, defend us from instability, or occasional backsliding ; for it is remarkable, that the greatest scholars have been also the greatest sceptics ; and that tenderness of conscience has puzzled the most innocent persons, who have been afraid equally of superstition and enthusiasm.

Such
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Such are the obvious grounds of apprehension, that the belief of a Christian may be *shaken* by those very means which it is supposed to be *confirmed*; that is, by the excellence of reason, and the integrity of the heart. Both the wise and the good may attempt the same purpose, without suspicion that they should lose their way; but both plunge into darkness, by too eagerly searching after the light. This consideration is sufficient to alarm the most courageous and constant follower of Christ; and that especially, when being satisfied there is cause for circumspection, he inquires by what caution, by what prudence, he may escape the peril which awaits him. In matter of faith therefore, since some opinion must be given, it seems safer to believe literally and implicitly, than to hesitate about obscurities, conjectural interpretations, or seeming oppositions in the words of revelation; because learning, with all its discoveries, did never yet, of *itself*, either convert one heathen, or establish one believer. And we may say further, that overstrained piety, is at any rate, less likely to oppose and fight against God, than infidelity. However ridiculous it may appear, to believe all that we have been taught in our infancy, yet is it a laudable prejudice, which

which is impossible to be avoided, if there be any religious education at all : and when the time cometh, that the book of life can be read by the mature man, with advantage, then let it be perused with *humility*, and not scrutinized with *presumption*; and let the Christian pray for God's *grace*, to *direct* and *assist* him, rather than rely on the illuminations of his own proper acuteness, and sagacity. In a slippery path, among precipices, it is no mark of cowardice to depend upon the divine arm, and not upon ourselves; it is caution without timidity, it is confidence without rashness. This is the very rule recommended by our Lord himself, and all his Apostles; who, when they first preached the faith, as it is in Christ Jesus, proposed to their followers, that they should receive it as children do the nourishment of their mothers; “As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”—St. Peter, chap. 1. ver. 2. By this rule we may be directed in the difficult course of our profession: we become strong through weakness—we fall through strength.— Human life is exactly the same in all its stages: The *infant* cannot sustain itself; no more can the *man*, independent of Providence, and both the one and the other (either

(either literally or figuratively) incur misfortunes, by attempting to walk alone.—There is, in fact, an intimation of an imperfect nature, running through man in every act and thought, if he will descend to acknowledge it; and if he will not, he must learn that truth from the severe lessons of experience. In religion, as a system of science, he must be content to wander in uncertainty, and be distressed with the anxieties of a doubting judgement, if he commits himself to the pride of his own reason: In religion, as a scheme of practical morality; he must combat temptations, he must endure affliction, he must contend with boisterous passions; and if he can stand firm in his virtue, unbroken and perfect, he may boast himself, an exception, from the common *lot* of mortality, and despise the cold precepts of the Apostle; for he is in no danger of falling.

But since we are told, that even angels fell, and some of Christ's Disciples are convicted of infirmity by their own testimony; let us quit general argument, and try the issue by the *strongest possible cases*, against the propriety, or at least the necessity of the advice given us.—There is nothing against which humanity revolts with greater abhorrence, than the deliberate

deliberate effusion of blood. The destruction of a man, by the hand of his brother, is not only prohibited by the law of God, but by our feelings; we start at the thought; and no authority would persuade us, that we could be capable of a crime so horrid, and so enormous. Some will tell you, they could scarcely kill another even in self-defence; but to perpetrate such a deed, for the sake of revenge, is so base and so wicked, as to be utterly impossible. It must be allowed, indeed, that if there is any reliance to be placed in a man's virtuous resolutions, and in his stedfast obedience to the divine commandment, one might be answerable for him in this case; but what are all those tender sensibilities, where is all this sickening at the very idea of homicide, where is this pious fear of Heaven, when the *honor* of a man is affronted, when his person is insulted, or his pride galled, or his reputation scandalized? Why, it is forgotten, it is despised; and men meet with the weapons of death in their hands, determined upon mutual destruction, with as much ardour and alacrity, as if they were sacrificing their lives in the cause of that God who gave them their being, and who alone can rightfully take it away. Neither is the dreadful sin committed suddenly

suddenly in the paroxysm of passion, when the mind is toss'd and disturbed, as in suicide ; but the conflict succeeds *cool* recollection ; thinking, good men, in other respects, are engaged in it, and murder, from the very name of which, nature recoils, is committed upon the image of God, in defiance of God's judgments. And by whom ? by him, perhaps, who a few hours before would have said, as did Hazael to the Prophet, " Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ? " You all must admit, that in such a case, if in any, a Christian, who feared God, and loved his fellow creature, might assure himself, that no earthly motive could shake his constancy, could lead him against his reason, against his duty, against his hopes of salvation, to do a bloody deed of malice, with the most desperate insensibility of indifference.

Again, to descend one step lower in the scale of offences. We should suppose a married man would abstain from adultery, for his own sake. To any one, indeed, there are a multitude of considerations to restrain lust, and to keep a virtuous mind from base designs and impure desires ; but daily experience proves the weakness of religious, as well as civil obligations in this respect ; and that the most modest and just man in his notions,

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who may also have a strong interest to bias him against the crime, shall often be guilty of it; though being an husband, or a father himself, he *must* have detested *that peculiar* sin in others, and never have thought of it, but as a sort of treason against society, and branded with the most signal marks of Almighty vengeance. Whoever contemplates the blessings of the bed undefiled in his own domestic felicity, surely should be the *last* person to poison the peace of another, under the very circumstances which constitute, as he knows, his own happiness. Fenced in and defended by such barriers, virtue might be pronounced secure from the violence of any temptation; but the evil continually overflows all obstacles, and shews how little we can depend upon the influence of principles upon human frailty, demonstrating how easy it is to fall with every reasonable presumption on our side, that we should be able to stand upright, through the assistance of good dispositions, and the impression of religious hopes and terrors.

After these instances, it is almost needless to prove the same failure and instability in the ordinary occurrences of life; such as by impatience under sickness, troubles, and disappointments; indeed these are sometimes rather fits of ill

ill temper, than accusations of Providence; rather fretfulness than irreligion. But still there is an opening for admonition in another point of view, to those who seriously do their duty to God; viz. that they must not *claim* any thing from him on that account, or rest upon the merits of their righteousness; for this is not only the first symptom of insincerity, but a sort of condition for withdrawing our allegiance, if God doth not favor us in our own way, or according to what we suppose our rightful demands upon him. Such a notion implies, that every project and pursuit of a *good* man, *must* become the special attention of the Almighty; because it is written, that "The Lord careth for the righteous." And it seems to follow, as a consequence of this idea, that if the righteous man does not succeed in his wishes, he has a *just cause to complain*, which is exactly the argument of Satan, in the book of Job:— "Doth Job serve God for nought? But put forth now thine hand, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face!" If such a man, holding this opinion of religion, calls himself the servant of God, he is mistaken: He is an hireling, without fear or affection, and will desert his master.

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In these cases, from which I have argued in explanation of the text, it appears, that from a wrong judgment of the nature of our duty to God, from want of reflexion, from temptation, from violent emotions and impulses, we are never secure in the preservation of our integrity, though fortified by reason and resolution. We should therefore avoid, as much as may be, all hazardous enter-prizes or situations; upon which, would the time permit it, I could easily enlarge; for there is hardly any thing desireable or amiable in this our imperfect state of being, which may not possibly be the occasion of falling. One in particular, is the pleasure of company, the inter-course of men in friendship and familiarity. Many of our most delightful companions, in whose converse and so-ciety we love to divide our time, are frequently the most dangerous enemies to our credit and our peace. We may be seduced by the agreeableness of an intimate, to imitate his vices or his fol-lies, without being sensible of our seduc-tion. The harmless frivolousness of *one*, may make us idle; the levity of *another*, may make us thoughtless; the vanity of a *third*, may cause us to be-come proud, by admiring his splendor; or the dissipation of a *fourth*, may lead us

us into vice by mistaking excess for merriment. Our friend may part with his morality thro' festivity, or his faith thro' philosophical disputation; and we, unsuspectingly, may do the same. Peril enough there is on every side, to exercise the caution of the wisest and most pious; and with every effort of heedfulness and prudence, "The righteous falleth seven times a day." There is but one infallible rule to be directed by, and that is, to trust in God, and always to be suspicious and distrustful of ourselves. If God had intended that man should be able to support himself in trials by his own ability, he would have made him more perfect in his nature; but imperfect and feeble as he is, the Creator has pointed out, and declared where protection is to be found, even under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty.

END OF DISCOURSE XIV.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XV.

MAT. Chap. XXII. Ver. 12.

And he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a Wedding Garment?

THE parable, of which these words are a part, is designed to set forth the general offer of the gospel to all men : The refusal of it by the Jews, and the reception of the Gentiles into the Christian covenant. The punishment of the Jews, is literally pointed out in the destruction of their city : The invitation of the good and the bad, shews that sinners, if penitent, are capable of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice for us, as well as those who need no repentance ; but, then, what is signified by the expulsion and binding of him who had not on a wedding garment ?

The allusion, in this place, being all along to the form of ancient ceremonies, we suppose, that as the other guests were dressed in the manner practised at nuptial

tial festivities, so this one person was distinguished for *wanting* that peculiar ornament, which was the *sign* of his being invited, and *necessary* to his admission at the feast: which figure being applied to the gospel covenant, signifies that some indispensable qualification was deficient in him, who is here described to be cast out as unworthy of sitting at meat with the bridegroom. And, without much enquiry I think we shall fix our eyes upon *faith* as that necessary qualification, and specially the confession that Christ was the *Son of God*, which is the great tenet insisted upon by the apostles, and our Lord himself:—Thus St. John tells us, that “these things (that is, the history of our Saviour) were written, that ye might believe that *Christ is the Son of God.*” And Philip in the Acts, makes it the condition of the Æthiopians baptism; “If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest;” the answer to which is, “I believe that *Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*” The feast you observe, is for the marriage of the King’s *Son*; so that little doubt can be made of the wedding garment that must be put on, to enter into the joy of our Lord. I am not satisfied with the explanation some give of this passage, viz. that something must be

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done on our part, to intitle us to the privileges of the gospel; because this is a *general interpretation*, which does not suit with the *peculiarity* of the thing hinted at; neither do I agree that it might be any one of those christian graces, which in the spiritual phrase of devout writers, our souls ought to be decked with, to warrant our appearance in the mansions of the God of purity. Since we are not taught that *imperfections* of this sort go so far as irrevocably to exclude, and to punish everlastinglly, him who may be subject to them, though they may cause him to be one of the lowest in the kingdom of heaven.

The distinction lies here: that although many virtues are necessary to make a perfect christian, and we are bound to labour and strive after the full measure of holiness, yet we are not to despair of salvation, because we cannot come up to the highest standard of righteousness; for this would make no allowance for temptations, ignorance and infirmity, which we constantly pray to be forgiven us, and which from the mercy of God, we hope will be pardoned. With all these imperfections on our heads, so far from being forbidden to approach the footstool of the Almighty, we are commanded to come

come into his presence with confession of sins, and are encouraged to trust in his acceptance of us upon repentance. If therefore our charity be not so warm or so extensive as it ought to be ; if our humility is not quite sincere ; if our forgiveness of injuries and trespasses be incomplete, these are disqualifications in a degree ; but we may correct and amend our lives in those respects, and being renewed in the spirit of our mind, are capable of a restoration to God's favour. On the contrary, the wedding garment which the unwelcome guest wanted, was some one radical and fundamental quality, without which, all his other ornaments were vain.

This gives the case of many persons, who esteem themselves christians, and entitled to all the privileges of the gospel, merely from profession, and the exercise of moral virtues ; they may be, as were many heathens, virtuous, sober, honest, amiable men ; but they are not *such* christians, as to have a claim to enter into the marriage chamber, because they are not *perfect in faith*. They are deficient in that first indispensable article of the covenant, under which they may be partakers of the benefits derived from Christ's merits, whose redemption regards those

only, who confess and believe in him as the *Son of God.*

Upon this ground stand those also, who reject the incarnation, and hold our Lord to have been a mere man, like ourselves ; sent indeed by God, and authorized by Him to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins ; an example of Godliness and innocence, and a teacher of righteousness. By these men the resurrection is acknowledged, but the atonement is denied ; and the whole merit of our Saviour is comprised simply in his obedience. Now as to such christians as shut , it is most clear that they *must* be theseout, upon their own principles ; for if the kingdom of heaven is like the marriage made for the *King's Son*, not allowing Jesu to be that son, they cannot offer themselves at a feast, where they deny the rank and quality of the very person for whom it is made : They, and all the rest of mankind are invited in *this name only*. It is not a feast in honour of the King's messenger, or his prophet or priest simply, but of *his Son* ; and this confession is the only title by which they can sit down with the entertainer, for this plain reason ; that they are called by no other person than the *Father* of that *Son* ; who declares Him to be *such*, who best

best knoweth *what* He is, and stoppeth the mouth of gainsayers, by that declaration. If the gospel dispensation consist in moral virtue, then has faith no concern in it: If it was given by a *man*, then was this feast celebrated for the marriage of a *man*, and *not* for the *King's Son*; so that the scripture is false, and we are to believe that God is not true.

But that the marriage garment must be an acknowledgment that Jesus Christ was the *Son of God*, and that nothing else can be intended, appears further from the following considerations. It must have been something essentially necessary: Upon which account the graces and accomplishments of the christian character could not form that requisite so rationally, as the original fundamental confession, upon which they are built, and from which they derive their value. All duties incumbent upon christians, and the advantages belonging to the performance of them, flow from the title to salvation, claimed by those who believe Jesus to be *the Christ*; but we cannot separate the office of Christ from the relationship of the Son;—for at the baptism of Jesus, which was immediately before his anointing, or the conferring the name of Christ upon him, a voice from heaven proclaims

him to be the *Son of God*. " And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight-way out of the water, and lo ! the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and resting upon him : And lo ! a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved *Son*, in whom I am well pleased." We are not christians, 'till by baptism we have entered into covenant with this Christ ; and the primary article of that covenant is our belief, which we openly profess, that He is the *Son of God*. As christians, and upon no other footing we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven ; in other words, this is the passport whereby we enter into the marriage feast. But if we fall off from this confession, we cease to be christians, and shall be cast out, if we presume to intrude ourselves under false pretences. For the proposition is convertible, Christ is the *Son of God*, and the *Son of God* is the Christ ; there is no middle sense of the words, or any modification of them, by which we can be saved. Hence it is that our Saviour calls himself the Door, and saith " No man cometh to the Father, but by the *Son*." It cannot have escaped your notice, that he who had not a wedding garment " was speechless," or had nothing to

to say for himself, when he was questioned respecting his intrusion. This circumstance, as well as the manner of his punishment, agrees with the scriptural representation of those who shall be condemned at the last day: which tends to support the exposition I have here given of the text. This is further confirmed by the discourse of our Lord with the Pharisees, which is found at the close of the same chapter of St. Matthew, whence the parable is taken.—“ Jesus asked them, saying, what think ye of Christ, whose *Son* is he? they say unto him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, how then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand ’till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son? And no man was able to answer him a word.”

But St. Peter’s confession will put an end to all further argument. “ Jesus asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that *I the Son of Man*, am? And they said, some say that thou art John the Baptist, some Elias, and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets: He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered, Thou art Christ,
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the *Son of the Living God* ;” which our Lord instantly ratifies with the most emphatic approbation. “ Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah.” Two very remarkable particulars occur in this passage ; First, that the nature of Christ is not like that of the old prophets, who though sent and inspired by God, were not his sons, but mere men : and Secondly, that Christ calls himself the *Son of Man* in the very same place, where he commends Peter’s acknowledgment of his being the *Son of God*. The meaning of this is explained in the words of the apostle, to the Romans :—“ Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was made of the *seed of David*, according to the *flesh*, and declared to be the *Son of God* with power.”* Whether the apostles or their disciples had any immediate revelations of *the manner* in which the two natures existed in our Saviour, we are not informed by their own writings or tradition ; but from the expression of walking by faith and not by sight, the constant recommendation of implicit faith, in the words of their master, and

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* May it not be supposed, that when our Saviour so continually calls himself the “ Son of Man” he means to allude to the promise concerning the “ *seed of the woman?* ” The two phrases, though not strictly synonymous in English, may be brought together without much violence in the original language.

the language they use concerning this thing, wonderful to *us*, as if to *them* it was a clear credible fact, and to be received without hesitation. This not only justifies our accepting it on the same grounds, but lies upon us also as *an obligation* of the first necessity. For if we cavil and dispute, and contend for lights, which we are sure we cannot obtain, we must risk the consequences of wanting the wedding garment, and stand without, like the Jews and other wretched unbelievers.

I have already observed that infidelity of this kind, contradicts the baptismal covenant; and as that great ceremony of the sacrament is a renewal of our first engagement, it must be equally rendered vain and indeed impious, by the want of the true and perfect condition of faith that Christ is the Son of God: Which is a consideration of the last importance to those, who approach literally to partake of the Lord's Supper, and to receive the spiritual blessing of that feast. A few particulars of strict enquiry into the institution and use of this rite, will be satisfactory. Who was it that ordained the continual celebration of this ceremony in his church? Undoubtedly the same that God sent into the world: And we
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read " that God so loved the world, that He *gave* his only *begotten Son.*" For what purpose was He given? " that all who who believe in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." So that here three several points are established: First, that God *gave*, or surrendered up his only Son to death, out of love to the world. Secondly, that we should *believe Him, the Son,* to have been by his death, the atonement for our sins; and Thirdly, that through *this belief,* we should have everlasting life, and not perish. You are sensible that it is the last member of the argument, which gives effect to the whole; for if we do not believe the *Son of God* to have been *given*, we are still in our sins, and may perish. This is the uniform tenor of Christ's doctrine, and that of his apostles. Therefore when He appointed the perpetual commemoration of his body broken, and his blood shed for the redemption of mankind, He intended to impress upon our memories the whole scheme and process of that wonderful work. In regard to God, his *love* was manifest in *giving his Son:* In regard to the *Son,* his willing obedience unto death for our sakes, was that sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, with which the Father was well pleased: but

but in regard to ourselves, it is the belief of this, intire and complete, which communicates the benefits of God's design, and his Son's performance of his will: The consequences of such belief we trust will be gratitude, repentance, and newness of life.

But this gratitude must be imperfect, if it be not for the gift of God's *Son*; nay, we infer that God would not have pardoned the world for any oblation of less value and merit, and therefore our amendment and repentance would not have been assured of their reward. Texts of scripture might be multiplied to shew that this, and no other, is the apostolical faith; and if ours be not the same as was their's, it is difficult to say that they are our instructors. Let those however, who come to their Lord's Table, reflect seriously, that if they do not fully assent to the express declarations of the gospel, they are intruders, without the wedding garment.

What are the solemn words, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ given, and the blood of Christ shed, to them who do not believe that Christ was the *Son of God*? They cannot feed upon Him in the heart *through faith*, for their *faith* is imperfect: They cannot be truly thankful,

ful, for they do not put a *just* value upon his *merits*.

Had Christ been of less glory and honour than He is declared to be, why should He have been the object of perpetual commemoration, any more than the prophets, who came to convert mankind, as He did, and who were slain, as He was, by ungodly and wicked men? or, if He was no better than they, how came it that *His Death* should be the means of salvation unto mankind, rather than theirs? But one single argument shall conclude.

For what cause did the Jews at last crucify Him? Even because he asserted Himself to be the *Son of God*: And that his kingdom was not of this world. Take ye heed therefore, that ye do not crucify Him afresh, by the same denial of his divinity, and be shut out of that marriage chamber, which is likened to the kingdom of heaven.

END OF DISCOURSE XV.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XVI.

ROMANS, Chap. V. Ver. 6, 7.

*For when we were yet without strength,
Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely
for a righteous man will one die, but
peradventure, for a good man, some
would even dare to die.*

THE latter part of this text has been often the subject of criticism; and from the supposed difficulty of giving it a reasonable interpretation, some have doubted its authenticity: But I think a few short observations, will remove the obscurity, and furnish at least one plain and acceptable sense of the passage. In the former verse St. Paul says “ Christ died for the ungodly:” And then to shew how extraordinary and meritorious an act this was, he goes on, “ Scarcely for a righteous man will one die,” that is, presuming the virtue of any person to be ever

ever so perfect, yet you would hardly find one friend in the world, who would lay down his life for him : How greatly then is the sacrifice of Christ's blood magnified, who gave Himself not for the upright, but for the wicked : which explanation of the words is confirmed by the verse following. " But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." So far then the meaning seems discovered ; but how are we to account for what comes after ? which seems in some sort a contradiction to that which preceded it, inasmuch as it is strange language ; that " scarcely any one would die for a *righteous* man, and yet perhaps, that some would dare to die for a *good* man." *Righteous* and *good* appear to be synonymous terms, and yet they are here opposed to each other.

I conjecture therefore, that the apostle in these words, refers to the disciples and other believers, and to himself, who would have sufficient courage to witness their confession unto death, of this *good* man, even Christ. This might be farther supported by a nice attention to the words *one*, *some*, *peradventure*, and *dare* ; but at present there is no room for such a discussion : for without much refinement,

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the paraphrase of the whole may stand thus, Christ has shewed the excess of God's love to mankind, by dying for the *ungodly*; which is the more wonderful, because generally, scarce a single person could be found, who would die for the *righteous*.—And yet, possibly, through faith and gratitude to this excellent Person, some, such as we his chosen servants, may dare to die for His sake, as He has died for us, and other sinners.

I think also, that St. Paul might apply the title *good*, to our Saviour *specially*, though our Lord in the 19th of St. Matthew declines it, declaring that it was the attribute of God only. But since the goodness of God was perfected by this act of obedience in his Son, the epithet may not be inaptly transferred, in this place, to the agent.

Admitting this to be a satisfactory answer to the objections, we have three points of consideration before us: First, that Christ actually did die, and that not for the good, but for the wicked. Secondly, that the motive for this extraordinary deed was the love of God: And Thirdly, that to the utmost extent of our power, we should make some return to our benefactor, for his great mercy.

The death of Christ, as an historical fact, was denied by some of the ancient Heretics,

Heretics, as it is at this day by the Mahometans, who affect to believe as they affirm, that Jesus was conveyed away, and that another suffered on the cross in his room; a fable, which had it not been too gross for credibility, or had it not been contradicted by a great body of evidence, Heathen, Jewish and Christian, would have found support in the universal consent of all the sects of adversaries, which the new religion had to contend with; because such a circumstance would have at one stroke, demolished the principal pillars, if not the whole fabric of Christianity: The doctrine of atonement, the resurrection, and the chief complements of prophecy, must have vanished. But the tide of general belief being against this fiction; the real dying of Christ is in a manner undisputed; and is, upon many accounts, a most important article of our creed: because it is that middle link in the chain of our redemption, which connects the doctrine of our Saviour with the proof of its truth, and joins the reward to the promise.

When John the Baptist came to announce the Messiah, he cried " Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" which is the victory of Christ over sin and the grave; but which could not be accomplished without a previous extinction

extinction of life, to be afterwards restored. The evangelists do all of them expressly make mention of it, but in St. John it is spoken of with a particular circumstance, by which it is proved anatomically, when he relates the piercing of our Lord's side by a spear; "and thence came out (says he) blood and water;" a peculiar appearance, the consequence of which perhaps the apostle was not himself acquainted with; but which is now known to be an incidental proof of positive death. Hence it is insisted upon in the epistles of the same disciple, that there are three which bear record in earth, the spirit, the water, and the blood, agreeing in the same testimony.

This point therefore, ascertained with so much accuracy, is of the utmost consequence to our faith: It fixes the sense of many prophecies, especially those of Isaiah, who in the power of inspiration declared, "that the righteous servant of God should justify many, for He should bear their iniquities;" which is not only an allusion to the sacrifice offered by the high priest for the people, under the law of Moses; but literally a transcript of the words in the 16th of Leviticus, recognized by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, which describes more fully than any other single part of scripture,

the intent and use of our Saviour's sufferings. We read in this place that " All things are purged with blood," and " without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins ; " which accounts for the words of our Lord to his sorrowful disciples, " that thus it behoved Christ to suffer."

We may recollect, that it required all the authority of the master, to reconcile his followers to the expediency of his dying ; neither could they afterwards easily persuade several of their own hearers of the necessity of such sacrifice, which is the reason of its being so continually insisted upon, in the apostolical writings to the churches. But if we consider the awful judgment of the Flood, the memorials of which remain at this day, the great mercy of God, who delivered Noah and his family, in the day of his wrath ; yet that within 130 years from that period, the grandchildren of that very patriarch, should, as it were, wage open war against heaven ; if we advert to the whole history of the world, from that time to the coming of Christ, and reflect that it presents nothing to our minds but the annals of wickedness and rebellion against the Almighty, notwithstanding all his judgments and plagues, his admonitions and menaces, by which He would have recalled

called and reformed them ; though the impiety of mankind must strike us with horror and amazement, yet, if such were the counsel of God that he would not utterly destroy the human race, it was almost of necessity, that some supernatural exertions of his goodness and power should accomplish that design.

When such was the patience and long-suffering of God, it was agreeable to the nature of his attributes, that the means of man's redemption should be wonderful, as was his condescension to permit us to be redeemed at all. Why God should thus provide himself a Lamb for the sacrifice, why that offering should have been his Son, is like Himself hidden from our eyes; but is not upon that account, less the object of our adoration and gratitude. And why He should spare and save his enemies, rather than destroy them, is for our admiration, not for our knowledge : Yet without curiously attempting to pry into mysteries, we may observe that this great work was of the constant tenor of all his dispensations, by which he not only shewed himself God of Gods and King of Kings by his power, but distinguished his government, and the services he demanded of his people, by the mildness and compassionate tenderness of fatherly authority.

The Heathen mythology was a religion of fear: their deities ruled by terror, and were worshipped because they were fierce and implacable. To them no attributes were given, which should engage the affections of men, but the apprehensions of their votaries were to be excited by their power and violence: To appease their vengeance, men sacrificed the fruit of their bodies; but God was reconciled to the world by the sacrifice of his own Son, and spared those who should have died.

What a superiority is this? He, who could have confounded his enemies by power, as He did formerly by the hand of Moses, now openly triumphs over them, by mercy and pity, by the superior dispensation of his Son, who bought their pardon by his punishment, and died that they might live.

It is not impossible but that this peculiar excellence of the christian religion, might be the reason why the Gentiles embraced it more readily than the Jews: To them the covenant of mercy and grace was totally new and extraordinary, compared with the system which they had lived under; and as every thing is more disposed to follow, than to be compelled, they were taken with the delightful

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ful gentleness of its nature, and became converts from admiring its beauty.

Omitting however to enquire further into this matter, it is clear that the mode and form of human salvation could proceed only from the love of God, which is the second head of our enquiry.

By the word love, we are not to understand the passion, as it affects the breast of man, but that pity, as the scriptures express it, which a father has for his own children; or as in this case it must be, the disposition to forgiveness, which the law-giver entertains for those subjects who have broken his ordinances. But God, besides his being the law-maker, is also the judge, and therefore whatsoever He determines, however contradictory it may seem to justice, must nevertheless be indubitably just.

He is our creator, and, as David says, He knoweth whereof we are made, He remembereth that we are but dust: Such frail materials must naturally produce an imperfect substance, and therefore He is not extreme to mark their backslidings. He permits Himself to be called the Father of mankind; He acknowledges a relation to them, and therefore his care for their happiness, his desire that they should be blessed, is abundant and perpetual. If they will not hear, and be

guided or restrained, He expresses grief and concern at their folly and perverseness; and in the very crisis of destruction, rather than they should utterly perish, He worketh for his great Name's sake; He maketh a new thing in the earth, and beyond all the measures of affection, or hope of salvation, He even anxiously interposes between his vengeance and his justice, and accepts a recompence or ransom, taken from his own essential divinity. No plea of any man's righteousness availed with Him, for *all* were guilty in his sight, so that no possible motive could actuate his mercy, but love.

How often as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, would I have preserved you, faith God, but ye would not! This is a parental expostulation with his children, which describes on one side tenderness and care, on the other contempt and obstinacy. But this we know was the course of God's goodness, struggling with the malice of men, from the beginning unto the end.

In vain did he exclaim, " Why will ye die, O house of Israel?" They would go on still in the path of destruction; and nothing but God's infinite pity, by a marvellous and unheard of providence, could have delivered them. How great was that love to the world, one single act

act will demonstrate: When the innocent instrument, by which our redemption was to be completed, sweat blood in the agony of apprehended torments, and prayed earnestly, that the cup might pass from Him, still God would not be intreated by his own Son, though he denied not to be intreated for man: He would not spare the obedient and the righteous, though the wicked and the enemies were spared through Him.

But now, in the third and last place, What return can we make, for the unspeakable benefits we receive from so much goodness? See the Lamb of God, innocent and unresisting, brought to the slaughter, that our sins might be washed away by his blood! Hear Him, crying out in the excess of misery, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Perhaps, at that moment He was assailed by the strongest temptations of the wicked one: Perhaps, at that instant it might distract his soul to think, how useless to some wretches, all that He then suffered would be; or perhaps, at one and the same instant, all those tortures and pains which a wicked world had deserved for its sin, might pierce *His* spirit with accumulated bitterness.

This, whatever it was, He underwent for our sakes; if we believe it, if we

reflect upon it, let it produce some effect upon us.

All that we can do is inadequate to make return for his sacrifice; but *all* we must give. We must look upon Him, whom our offences have pierced, and whilst we commiserate his great distress, become grateful also for his immense love!

Let us consider, what a state of glory He left; and what sorrow and distress He submitted to, that we might change our condition from wretchedness to happiness; and above all, that whatever we resign, in acknowledgment of his goodness, is more for our own sakes than His. What we part with is temporal and transient; what we obtain, through Him, is heavenly and eternal.

END OF DISCOURSE XVI.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XVII.

ST. LUKE, Chap. XVI. Ver. 8.

*And the Lord commanded the unjust Steward
wisely to because he had done wisely.*

THE parable from whence these words are taken, has been always a stumbling block for the critics, who have not been able, with all their industry, to expound it satisfactorily, even to themselves; so that the undertaking to throw any new light upon the subject at this day, seems almost hopeless. However, as it falls in our way, something must be attempted.

One difficulty which arises on the passage before us, is occasioned by mistaking *the Lord* there mentioned, for *our Lord*, or Christ; whereas the person intended, is the master or lord of the steward.

Another error is, the supposition that he commended or approved of the injustice of the steward; when in fact, he only acknowledges the policy of his conduct; which interpretation is justified by the

the comment or observation immediately following the text: "For the children of this world are *wiser in their generations*, than the children of light." He speaks here of worldly wisdom, opposed to that which the gospel terms wisdom unto salvation: And without any regard to the morality and rectitude of the action, advert's simply to the diligence and management of a bad man, exerting himself upon his own principles, to obviate the distressful consequences of a misfortune, which was about to fall upon him.

The praise therefore bestowed in these words, must not be taken to convey a serious commendation of the fraud, but a representation of the opinion of the world, which seemingly justifies any practices made use of to escape from those inconveniences, which are incurred by dishonest and treacherous actions. I say the world seemingly justifies such attempts, by not condemning them; by looking with indifference on the manœuvres, tricks and collusions of an offender, whom they expect to defend himself in that manner.

Of this, there are daily instances in judicial proceedings: We say a thief has a *right* to attempt any evasion or artifice, to save himself from condign punishment, and that he would be a fool to neglect such

such means for his preservation. What more is said in the passage we are treating of? the master commends the act of his unfaithful servant, not as agreeable to the rule of right, but as conformable to the wisdom of the world in such extremities, with whose system it is consistent, that one evil deed should be supported by another; and as he had *first* cheated him, and was about to be dismissed for it, it belonged to worldly prudence, that he should cheat him a second time, for his own preservation.

But further, this note or explanatory inference from the master's commendation, at the same time that it gives the ground and reason of such commendation, as I have stated it, contains a sentiment, not easy to be understood: For although we can comprehend the principle to which the master alludes, to be the wisdom of this world, yet how comes it that upon comparison, the preference should be apparently given to the maxims of the children of the world, over the children of light: For in regard to their respective actions and motives, this cannot be reasonable.

The misapprehension of this part of the passage, is occasioned by omitting to consider the words "in their generation," which mean duration, or time of existence,

ence, and then by a paraphrase, the interpretation will stand thus: The children of this world being attached solely to material objects, look no further than to the life that now is; their thoughts and desires are confined to the present, to mortal and earthly things; but on the contrary, the children of light have other wishes and affections, higher hopes, more enlarged prospects, and superior attainments to pursue: Yet, if they do not with equal zeal and activity, contend for the nobler prize of their calling and profession, which the mere carnal man exerts to obtain his finite and limited ends; without doubt *he* is the wisest, as being the most strenuous and vigilant to secure the aim of his particular purposes, according to his own proper notions and principles.

The children of light are, in respect to spiritual happiness, which is above, and everlasting, foolish, upon comparison with the children of this world, who, having no thoughts beyond the blessings and felicities of the earth, lose no opportunities of securing them.

The preference is not to be supposed of the vain and perishable good things, which may be possessed *here*, to the joys and rewards of immortality; but of the diligence and fervency, with which one follows

follows after the pleasures and interests of *his generation*, to the carelessness and unconcern, with which the other regards objects that shall endure beyond all generations and time.

The ground being so far cleared, we begin to discern the scope of the parable, through the obscurities of those remarks which accompany it. The stewardship shews that every individual has some office, some duties, which are intrusted to him to fulfil: The account demanded signifies, that we are answerable for the use and application of the charge, and the dismission for bad management intimates the punishment, which will ensue our ill administration of them.

Next comes the conduct of the steward in contemplation of the issue. And in this place, which is the material point to be considered, the question respects *future safety and protection*: What should be done in the great extremity and emergency, to prevent his being utterly destitute? You see, concerning temporal things, the servant makes himself friends by a mode of proceeding, accommodated to the nature of those concerns, and for this he is called wife.

The doctrine therefore which flows from that applause, serves to shew, that it is of much more consequence to think of

of our future safety in *spiritual* interests, which if attended to with the like disposition and care, may insure to us an asylum in those *distresses which are spiritual*: but that, to their shame and confusion, men anxiously employ themselves in the one case, and are heedless, and consequently unwise in the other.

In those matters which refer to our eternal welfare, we have many talents, as the gospel terms them, trusted to our management, which we waste: And, these being the goods of our Lord, and *not our own*, we are accused for the misuse of them, by that Holy Spirit, which speaks to our consciences, and records our disobedience in heaven. Then it is, we lose the favour of God; His countenance no longer shines upon us, we are forlorn and despondent, and say within ourselves "what shall we do?" dig we cannot: that is, we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; our faculties and abilities are incapable of affording us relief in a calamity which we have deserved: And we are so little accustomed to those exercises of prayer and devotion, which are effectual to console the troubled mind, that we are unable to profit of their virtue. To beg we are ashamed; and doubtless with good reason.—For, to whom can we apply?

We

We know too well that good men shun the wicked from an hatred to their vices, and the reprobate avoid the righteous, from consciousness of their being unworthy : But what in fact is a bad man to beg ? advice, comfort, or commiseration ? With what face can he make his wants known ? How humiliating to the pride of iniquity, that it should stoop to ask medicine for the soul from another man, whom, by that very act he admits to be better than himself ?

What then ; shall he beg of his offended Maker, to restore him ? Alas ! all sinners are in the condition of our first parents, who hide themselves from the presence of God, being *ashamed*, because they perceive themselves to be naked : Having lost their innocence, they are compelled, as David saith, "to cover themselves with their confusion, as with a cloak."

Does not this strongly correspond with the temporal misery of the unfaithful servant ? But what finally, to carry on the application, shall he resolve upon ? Not indeed as in the narrative of the parable, by procuring friends through dishonesty, but still, by addressing himself to that friend, who alone is competent to afford counsel and consolation, and through whom only he can be received into

into the house not made with hands ; when through his own demerits, he shall have deserved to be shut out.

When the wrath of God hangs over an offender, when his stewardship is about to be taken from him, when fear is on every side, and he knoweth not how to secure himself for futurity, what doth heavenly wisdom recommend in spiritual distress, but the same measure as would be wise in a temporal calamity, that he should fly to that refuge, which can alone protect him ; and with every energy and power that he is possessed of, conciliate and assure himself of that auxiliary, who only can interpose between him and the vengeance of his Lord.

In the illustration of scripture, it is not held to be necessary, that allusions should exactly fit in every particular : But in interpreting that which we read in this parable, by what I venture to suppose might have been intimated by the context, there are so many circumstances of parallelism, as to persuade me that the reference is fair and useful, even if it be not the precise exposition which was intended to be conveyed to us.

But you will be further satisfied on this head, by attending to the words of Christ, which immediately follow those,
upon

upon which I have so far argued : “ And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” There are but two senses in which this passage can be understood.

First, He might mean, after the same form, and with the same care that ye make yourselves friends of this world, for worldly ends, so make to yourselves heavenly friends, for eternal purposes ; or, Secondly, He might utter it sarcastically ; for sarcasm was a figure He did sometimes condescend to use, as in this instance, “ If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out ? ” And then the meaning will run thus : If your hearts are so set upon the things of the earth, as to prefer them to things above ; and you approve the conduct of this unjust steward, who purchased to himself friends in time of need, with the wages of iniquity ; I commit you to the effect of your own wisdom ; see, whether *these* will provide mansions for you in another world, when the present shall pass away ; or, when ye shall be compelled to leave it !

Now, connecting these words of Christ with the parable, and the short comment upon the steward’s wisdom, it appears,

that the difficulties diminish, and that the drift of our Lord was to lay down one short and plain line of instruction, viz. that as in the affairs merely of the world, men cautiously guard against losses, and the hazard of events, which is the proof of their wisdom, so should those who have the revelation of life eternal, and believe it, exercise the same forecast, as to the risks of *their* futurity.

You may remark, that it is an ordinary mode of teaching with our Saviour, to contrast two different sorts of men, their situation and their conduct, leaving the inference to the judgment of his auditors.

Thus, he opposes in this parable, the children of this world to the children of light; and we meet with the same phrase in various parts of the New Testament. John xii. 35. " Then said Jesus unto them, yet a little while is the *light* with you, walk whilst ye have the *light*, lest darkness come upon you. While ye have light, believe in the *light*, that ye may be the *children of light*."

Again, 2d Thessal. Chap. v. Ver. 2, 4, 5. " For yourselves know perfectly, that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief: Ye are all the *children*

children of light, and the children of the day.

From these citations we learn who are described in those particular words, and what is expected from them. Indeed St. Paul's language represents the very case, which is hinted at in the parable : he exhorts his converts to make use of their knowledge, *i. e.* their wisdom, that they should not be overtaken unprepared by sudden destruction.

Ye know perfectly, says he, ye are all the children of light. He exhorts by encouragement ; our Saviour does the same thing by reproof.

I will therefore conclude this whole argument with the decision of St. James, which is so very pertinent to the design of that gospel we now discuss, that it may serve as an explicatory observation on the steward's policy, and Christ's speech concerning it. Ye adulterers and adulteresses ! know ye not that the friendship of the world (that is, the friendship of the mammon of unrighteousness) is enmity with God ? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God.

26 MR 59

END OF DISCOURSE XVII.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

MAT. CHAP. VII. VER. 15, 16.

Beware of false Prophets! which come to you in sheep's cloathing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.

BY the words false prophets in the text now read to you, we are to understand, not only those who deceived the multitude with fallacious predictions, but more especially the teachers and propagators of false doctrines; those who first seduced mankind into attention to their sayings, and then led them astray through personal confidence in their professions; who beguiled their senses by the imposition of fair appearances, and afterwards abused their credulity. In a general sense which is the most useful application of our Saviour's caution, it extends to all cases where the honest simplicity of mankind is liable to be imposed upon, by that cunning craftiness, which

which (as the apostle says) lieth in wait to destroy ; and to make his meaning more obvious, our Lord hath expressed it by an allusion to a fable of antiquity, the moral of which was well known, and had become proverbial.

In the first and principal view which this subject presents itself to us, we cannot but observe the most afflicting spectacle which can strike the human mind : We see religion, in itself naturally perfect and pure, not only suspected of hypocrisy, but in reality often put on as a mask, to conceal evil designs, and to assist their success ; which is the more grievous to behold, because the consequence of frequent deception in this manner, creates an indiscriminate diffidence in all good appearances, and prevents that favorable reception of the world, at first acquaintance, with even a truly just and virtuous man, which by right he is entitled to.

Possibly the wise Solomon was conscious of this difficulty, when he said, " Be not righteous over much ; " for as there is no great danger of mankind being in fact too good, he could advert only to the semblance of the thing, to the outside and visible form of it.

The words of our Lord, now before us, are strong and decisive.—Beware, be upon your guard ; you know not what

is in the heart of man ! And from the practice of men, it seems clear enough that they have attended to *this* precept, however they may have neglected *others* of equal importance : for there are those who carry the maxim so far as to believe *every one* dishonest, 'till they find him otherwise ; which is a strange extension and perversion of our Saviour's counsel, and can be founded only on its utility respecting some temporal concerns, or the knowledge these persons have of their *own* duplicity, which leads them to imagine every other man as crafty and artful as themselves.

However this be, such is the condition of human opinions, that a good man must content himself with the consciousness of his own integrity, and await the day when his true character shall be known, by the fruits of it ; which is, as the gospel informs us, the only touch-stone, by which every one can be proved, whatever his pretensions are from appearances. I will therefore attempt in the following discourse to explain, how far we are to distrust or beware of false brethren, and to shew, that if we can restrain our passions 'till the event takes place, we shall then know them by the consequences of their actions.

In the records of history we have some notable

notable examples exactly to our purpose. Such was the imposture of Mahomet, who assumed to himself the honor of a divine commission, to preach a new religion to mankind : He seduced an ignorant race of men, by pretended revelations, and by an assumed sanctity of manners : but what was this prophet in secret, but an impious and licentious profligate, setting no bounds to his lusts and his cruelties ? and what was his doctrine, but that of fatalism, or irresistible decrees, carnal libertinism, and even a paradise of sensuality ? The effect corresponds with the cause.

The peace of Mahometans is indolence ; their war ferocity ; their morals *publicly* severe, but *privately* dissolute ; their religion externally superstitious, but *really* a mass of folly and fallacy. This instance points so strongly in all its parts to the language of our Saviour in the text, that one might almost suppose He prophesied of it, when He said “ Beware of false prophets :—they shall be known by their fruits.”

Another case, is the conquest of Peru and Mexico, by the Spaniards. The pretence for entering that country was the propagation of Christ’s religion, but the true motive was its gold ; and the issue of the enterprize was the almost total extirpation

extirpation of an harmless and innocent people, whose blood calls loudly to heaven for vengeance, and has been avenged by the very means of those treasures, which the hypocritical wickedness of ravening wolves, in sheep's cloathing, despoiled them of.

It is a small thing, after these enormities, to speak of Jesuits, of Catholic Confessors, or Protestant Methodists; but we must lament that such is human depravity, and we must guard against its frauds. The first rule therefore, founded equally upon general history and domestic experience is, to restrain our confidence in boasters of their religion: for righteousness is like liberality, it shuns popular applause, and wishes to be known only to Him who seeth in secret. Not that any man need be ashamed of his piety and virtue, but that it is most *genuine* when it is most *modest*. For, if the gospel of Christ, so far from promising honors or riches, or power, or any *worldly* advantages, does on the contrary declare, that many *difficulties* and *inconveniences* will be the lot of true believers, and that *their* reward shall only be in *heaven*; when we see men *sandimoniously* *vain*, anxiously *soliciting* an opinion of their Godliness, we have reason to suppose that they aim at a reward upon *earth*,

earth, that there is some view, as yet concealed, which waits for opportunity to ripen into success. If again we observe these self-same pharisees, (the object of their cunning being obtained) become haughty and revengeful, oppressive, uncharitable, we are certified by the *event*, that the glorious vision, which deluded our senses, was unsubstantial, or as the scripture expresses it, we then *know* the tree from its fruit.

It will however be objected, and at first sight, with some degree of justice, that if we are to attend the discovery of men's hidden designs, and 'till that hour distrust all men equally, the artful and the sincere are put upon a level, and the esteem which integrity deserves, is withheld from it.

This plea as to the good man himself is unnecessary, for as I have just now observed to you, *he looks higher*, his *conscience* furnishes his recompence, and *his joy* is in the *hope* of futurity.

But, if the argument regards the interests of society, as though any encouragement were given to actors in mask, by indifference to those who are honest and open, it may be answered, that the vigilance and caution which are recommended to us, do rather operate to repress all deceit and artifice, inasmuch as pretenders

pretenders become thereby less likely to succeed; and a lesson is held out to mankind, of the difficulty as well as the utility of imposition. Independent however of all *human* reason, the authority of the Master is sufficient to support the precept. He was not ignorant of the many obstacles which would be opposed to his religion, and among others, that from the very admiration and love of its purity, many would be induced to put it on as a cloak, and to make use of it as an instrument of their policy: From whence it would follow that the truth might be disgraced by the resemblance of it, feigned by deceit, unless the world were forewarned, that many would come in his name, and ensnare their confidence, if they did not wait for the *proof* of professions and appearances, in the fruits of them.

A second rule therefore is in this place suggested, viz. that we should be cautious of those who affect *gospel simplicity*, a peculiar plainness of manners and dres, who hold courtesy to be sinful, and whose every word is scriptural. It may seem hard to hold this doctrine, but the corruption of the best things is the worst sort of corruption; and a florid countenance often accompanies a diseased body.

As

As far as observation goes, this puritanical behaviour covers much selfishness and much pride; for no one is more careful of his interests, or more jealous of personal respect than is the puritan.

There are those who will not swear, or perhaps directly lie, but they will prevaricate within an hair's breadth of falsehood; they will not cheat, but they will make very acute bargains; they will not be uncharitable, but they will be benevolent to their *own only*; they will not hate, but they will despise all those whom they differ from; they will not offend, but they will deeply resent; so that in fact, the indiscreet and unwary part of mankind, is more liable to be over-reached and injured by their hollow meekness and humility, than by the bolder pretenders to Godliness. The stilllest waters are the deepest, and the fairest fruit is sometime the most poisonous.

But it is not hence to be understood, that *all* inoffensive appearances are to be suspected, or what is more, to be censured: for it is one thing to be prudent, and quite another to condemn rashly. The gospel advises only a *trial* of the spirits of men, which occurrences and events will make manifest; and it gives this counsel for the sake of virtue itself, which sustains unhurt, every experiment; whereas

whereas the unsound compound of hypocrisy crumbles away at the touch.

A third rule which I will venture to propose to you, as a safeguard against fallacy, is to distrust overstrained candour in men. There are those who obtain credit, and the good opinion of the world, by a sort of cool, complacent treatment of every misconduct which comes under their observation. They will palliate crimes, they will extenuate vices, they will excuse follies: Much will they discourse of human infirmity, of necessity, of temptations: In fine, no man with them is *absolutely wicked*, because every one is weak and fallible. Nothing is more amiable, more captivating, than this behaviour: Yet it falls out, for the most part, that there is no goodness of the heart at bottom; but that the very candid man is privately a great sinner himself, and wishes to be-speak favor to his own wickedness, by the indulgence with which he treats it in others. I scarcely know a more common deceit practised upon society, more cordially received, or more injurious than this is. The whole world becomes a dupe upon principle, for every good affection is aiding and assisting in the fraud. Candour has so many friends, that it is almost impossible to speak against

against it with effect. True or fictitious, it is engaging ; it has the form of *good nature* ; and then, how unkind to suspect it ? It is in appearance *impartiality* ; how unjust to doubt of it ? It is *humanity* ; how unnatural to oppose its operations ? It is *tenderness to the infirmities of our brethren* ; how cruel to restrain it ? Nay, it is christian *charity* itself, therefore it is downright wickedness to accuse it of any ill motive or design. All this is very fair argument, and the misfortune is, that the use of it may be applied in a very unjust cause, as often happens in other cases. For so easy is the habit of candour put on, and so becoming is it to every one who wears it, that we with difficulty prevail upon ourselves to be disgusted with so pleasing a figure. Every one is flattered by it, for no one is blamed. With the candid man, you may be what you please, good or evil, it is all one ; if you are virtuous, he is delighted ; if you are vicious, he reproaches not ; he himself is a man, imperfect, mortal, and God is merciful.— We must therefore enquire about the consequences of this half virtue, by which we shall find out when it is laudable, and when worthless, for the wisdom of our Saviour must here also be our guide, and

and by the fruits of it alone can we know it.

Indiscriminate candour must be absurd and hurtful to the world, for it makes no difference between misfortunes and crimes ; between that which deserves punishment, and that which claims our pity. It holds all men perfectly equal in its own sight, and thereby encourages audaciousness, and takes away shame. And this is that ill formed character which comes to us in sheep's cloathing, which caresses and is caressed by all sorts of men ; by the good even, for they are seldom rigorous, except with the incorrigible ; and who from timidity or want of exertion, suffer a vice to pass current as a virtue, for the sake of their consciences. The man of candour, who is of service to society, is one who is slow to judge, and prompt to applaud ; who would rather approve a good action, than have occasion to excuse a bad one ; who does not look upon the conduct of men with indifference, or talk of his neighbours, as fools do of pictures, that they are all very excellent, without giving merit its commendation, or worthlessness its contempt. In short, one who has a sound heart, if he has not always a clear head, and acts in every case with a real

a real good meaning, without interest or guile.

Having thus spoken to you of some instances of personal characters, tending to elucidate the doctrine laid down in the text ; I, lastly, will offer a few words upon certain opinions concerning the *quality* and *properties* of things, in the course of life, which are mistaken. Generosity is an accomplishment of much esteem, but it is a title often bestowed on a vice ; for extravagance sometimes passes for generosity, and we must examine before we can pronounce upon the name which it deserves. There is as much difference, says an ancient author, between the liberal man and the spendthrift, as between the miser and the œconomist. Generosity is not mere casting away money, but the free *use* of it : It is not the contempt of it as a thing of no value, but a real respect for money in the beneficial application of it. If a man, out of generosity (as he thinks) impoverishes his fortune, and ruins his family, this is a fraud upon himself, and a robbery of others. By the fruits therefore, ye shall know the vice from the virtue.

Again, honor is a word of lofty sound, and glorious attributes ; but like all splendid objects, it has a disposition to fascinate

fascinate the senses ; it blinds the eyes of beholders, and whilst they admire, they lose that clearness of perception, which would discover its imperfections ; for there are even spots in the sun. Honor is true when it is directed to honorable pursuits, when it restrains dishonorable actions, and even dishonorable thoughts. It is never genuine, if it be very proud, for pride is either folly or wickedness. Honor is justice, honor is religion : but if a man becomes a suicide, fearing the disgrace of poverty, which he has incurred by owing more than he can pay ; or kills his neighbour in a duel, because he cannot brook an affront ; in the first case he is no honest man, and in the second he is not a christian.

Finally, the social, easy, good humored temper, is of general regard : it brings men together in society ; it conciliates, it refreshes the mind ; hilarity is its companion, and friendship is never supposed to be absent. But still this very habit, agreeable as it is, must be cultivated with some jealousy. Idleness, dissipation, revelry, may ensue, and then, perhaps, you may begin to think some caution and some reserve might have been convenient, in the encouragement of this apparently innocent disposition.

Taste

Taste not, therefore, suddenly, lest there be death in the pot ; and for the sake of safety, attend with some respect to those who are wisely circumspect in their opinions and practices. If this be necessary in common life, and the ordinary course of things, it is much more incumbent upon us, at an æra like the present, of the strongest and strangest delusion that ever prevailed upon the earth. An attempt is made not only against the understandings of men, to corrupt and pervert their minds, but there is an attack upon first principles, upon every thing that hath been held venerable and true, and sacred from the beginning of the world. To this purpose, we are to be persuaded that mankind has hitherto sat in darkness and ignorance, but that a new light has suddenly shone forth, and of course a discovery is made of another rule of life, of other rights and privileges, than men were ever before acquainted with.— Hence, though a divine first cause is with some difficulty acknowledged, He is without attributes, or a revealed will. Natural instinct, and human reason, are said to be competent to the government of man, independent of any fixed notions of moral or religious obedience;

and the essence of liberty consists in absolute emancipation from every restraint, except such as for his own ends and purposes, every individual chuses to accept, and which afterwards he may reject at his pleasure.

This system and this doctrine are now openly propagated, and unfortunately are received, under the thin pretext of universal peace and fraternity ; and the proselytes to this sect are assured, that order and virtue can subsist, though all those obligations are dissolved, and the supreme authority of God's law is superseded by the inventions of men, which have of old constituted the happiness of society.

Whether this be a lying or a true divination, whether the wolf lie concealed, under the innocent whiteness of the sheep, let the murders, and rapine, and idolatry, and blasphemy of these teachers and their disciples proclaim.

If the Almighty Disposer of events has permitted a seed of this poisonous tree to fall into our land, for the trial of our faith and patience, and confidence in Him, to correct our vanity, to moderate our prosperity, or to punish our iniquities, let us submit to His visitation with humility and resignation ; but let it at the

the same time excite our vigilance against the enemy of our *souls*, as well as of our life, our property, and our tranquility ; let it animate our zeal in *His* service, which *alone* is *perfect freedom* ; then shall the integrity and sincerity of our faith be discerned in the effects of it : “ Our fruit will be unto holiness, and the end everlasting life !”

END OF DISCOURSE XVIII.

26 MR 59

DISCOURSE XIX.

ST. MATTHEW, Chap. VI. Ver. 12.

*Forgive us our Debts as we forgive our
Debtors.*

THE words before us immediately refer to the justice of God; and we peculiarly commit ourselves by this supplication, to the divine goodness and impartiality. With respect to our eternal welfare, it is the most important expression in that prayer of our Lord, from whence we take the subject of our present discourse; being a striking reprehension of the Jewish notion of retaliation, which demanded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and regulated their benevolence by the same strict measure. Taking advantage, therefore, of this prejudice, Christ proposes to their acceptance a consideration of interest, assuring them, that the very same law of retribution, whether of good or evil, which they should make use of towards others, would be put in force by Almighty God upon

upon themselves ; and to cut off all possible dissimulation, or hypocritical affectation of good will, which have no place in the sincere man, he enlarges the form of expression, in the parable of the lord and his servants, summing up the moral of it with this conclusion—" So shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if from *your hearts* ye forgive not every one your brother his trespasses." This forgiveness, then, does not consist in a mere ceremony, or set form of words, but in an acknowledgment, that we are all *men*, of like passions and failings ; that we are *brethren*, and equally have occasion to pray for mercy and forgiveness from our heavenly *Father*.

Place before your eyes, as in a picture, the whole race of mankind, struggling in the vale of misery ; the same grand object being in view to all of them, can it be avoided, that they should jostle against each other, in the degree that their contending interests interfere ? And let us further consider, that we ourselves make a part of this crowd, and are as likely to incommodate and offend our neighbour, as he is to disturb us. The argument is so clearly founded in nature, that the force of it must be universally admitted ; and, were it necessary, the daily occurrences of life would furnish

additional evidence to the like purpose. Whether the aim be at power, wealth, honor, or even competence, men must cross and impede each other in their pursuits, and the success of one person must be the failure of another. But then it is, that the stormy passions carry away our reason, that envy blackens our hearts, and anger prompts us even to commit violence upon our brother; that we hate him, for no other cause, but because he hath passed us in the race; forgetting that we contended for the same prize with our more fortunate competitor, and but for some accident, perhaps trifling, should have left him behind us, and have triumphed in that success which he enjoys, and we have fallen short of.

Offences of this sort it should seem, which are not only involuntary, but may be almost said to be of necessity, would find easy forgiveness in the breast of a fellow creature; and that wilful trespasses alone, needed the command of our Saviour included in the words before us: but we are treacherously partial to ourselves; each individual ever holds himself free from blame, and though he is admonished in the gospel to think lowly of his own merits, is yet so confident as to excuse his failings against the express letter

letter of the law, and to exclaim, it is natural to do this; who can help it?

Upon this account, our Lord, knowing what was in man, overpowers the evil spirit, by an argument of the highest importance, referring positively to our own pardon and salvation. Approach not the throne of grace with an unforgetting heart, but "be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father is also merciful." Surely it is much to the dishonor of humanity, that supreme authority should be requisite to induce us to do that which is so obviously our duty. If we really believe in the Son of God, we cannot well forget that new commandment he hath given us, "that we should love one another." He makes this benevolent disposition, this mutual charity and forbearance, the distinguishing characteristic of his followers; and if we are not *His* disciples, let us seriously ask ourselves, Whose are we?

But further, if we consider the consequences of an implacable disposition, upon a large scale, we shall discover, that almost all the millions, whom the sword, with its horrid attendants, famine and pestilence, have swept prematurely from the face of the earth, have been, in fact, the victims of those infernal deities;

ties ; *the long remembered injury, and the immortal hatred.*

Numerous instances to this purpose might be produced, from ancient, modern, and recent history. The revengeful, hard-hearted temper, hath filled the world with blood and violence from the beginning. It was, in a peculiar manner, the crime of the Jews, in respect to all their neighbours, and even to some of those descended from their common progenitor ; the recollection of which occasions us to pay a particular attention to that extraordinary punishment which they have borne for so many centuries. The wonderful dispersion of that people over the face of the whole globe, seems to have been specially ordained of God, that, in their degraded and impoverished state, they might be obliged to confess all the nations where they sojourn to be their brethren and their *neighbours*, “ because they shew mercy unto them.”

Domestic life, however, private family occurrences, and our own bosoms, will give the most affecting testimony, not only that the sin is almost universal, but that it brings its appropriate punishment along with it. Who can describe the anguish and distress of that man’s mind, who is conscious that he deserves no favour upon earth, and cannot pray with hope for

for the mercy of Heaven, because he hath disdained that very condition, upon which alone his pardon depends? He hath no part in Christ Jesus, who came into this world under the character of the Prince of Peace, to take away envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness.

But, besides, that all unkindnesses and antipathies, when they have once taken root in the heart, do necessarily cause inquietude and conscientious remorse; it will be found, also, that the very objects to which such unnatural affections are directed, prove finally delusive and vain; because all the good things of this world, for the sake of which men deal spitefully with one another, are not worth the trouble and anxiety with which they are pursued. Such is, indeed, the best excuse that can be made, if any excuse is sufficient, to palliate a sin, which rationally and religiously is indefensible—that it is the *fashion* and *habit* of mankind to follow their interests and enjoyments, at all risks and adventures, and therefore a selfish appetite must not be restrained by any sentiments of right or wrong, respecting others, or any apprehensions of personal disappointment in the issue. To correct this evil principle, and to obviate its wretched consequences,

quences, was the design of the gospel, whose general doctrine persuades us to set our affections on things *above*, and not on things of *the earth*; to lay up incorruptible treasures in Heaven, which is sufficiently rich to satisfy the cupidity of every one who seeketh after them; where there are pleasures for evermore, and honour is eternal. The fruition of these blessings is promised to those who imitate their *merciful* Lord, and the enjoyment of the transitory possessions even of this life is denied to them, who confess him with their lips, and in their hearts are far from him.

And now, as perhaps this commendation of a forgiving disposition, and the fruits of it, may excite some curiosity and reflection, upon the beauty and benefits of that Christian virtue, it is proper to inform you, that the excellency of it can never be attained, unless you add the *forgetfulness* of injuries to the *forgiveness* of them. This is the most difficult part to perform, but it is that which proves our sincerity. The memory, that treasure house of evil as well as good, cannot at will throw off the impressions made upon it by external objects; and when the passions are interested, an attempt to prevent the traces of past pleasures or miseries recurring frequently

frequently to the imagination, is almost impracticable. From the ardent affections of anger, lust, jealousy, and others of the same complexion, being re-kindled in the breast, the Christian grace of forgiveness is overpowered, and charity becomes extinct, even against all the struggles of human prudence, and the opposition of conscience. The first emotions, therefore, of our vile and corrupted nature, must be attended to, and every circumstance of recollection, which may bring back ancient enmities to our minds, should be cast out like an evil spirit.

But, there are men who seem to imagine this caution unnecessary, or at least impolitic, according to the wisdom of the world. They profess to hold the doctrine of forgiveness of injuries; but, for their own sakes, to retain the remembrance of them; thus literally adhering to the divine precept, and virtually departing from it. They affect the benevolence of Christianity, but make it consist with the suspicion, distrust, and dissimulation, of hypocrisy.

If such persons, however, would apply that device to their *own* cases, and with respect to the great Being whom they have offended, the fallacy and iniquity of such a reserve would be strik-

ingly evident. For what mean the scriptural expressions of *blotting out* sins, of sins being *covered* as well as forgiven, if they still remain noted in God's book? What advantage can be derived from God's promises, if such promises are equivocal? And to those who pay greater deference to the example of mankind than to divine precept or example, it may not be useless to observe, that even the Savages of America, when they make peace, do not only wash off the blood from the hatchet of war, but throw it into a river, or bury it under the ground.

The difficulty of fulfilling this duty of complete forgiveness, may be continually urged as an excuse for our failure in the performance of it, and the infirmity of human nature may be adduced in support of that argument; but let those who shelter themselves under such pretexts look to it—they will renounce the condition of their *own* pardon, and have forgotten, that they are encouraged to aim at the perfection of their Father which is in Heaven.

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THE END.

NOTE to Page the First.

IT must be understood, that the Evangelists who have given the history of our Saviour's temptation, speak of the agency of the Holy Spirit according to the *ideas* they respectively entertained of his operation; for they were not witnesses to any part of the transaction. Thus, St. Matthew and St. Luke might conceive our Lord to have been actuated by a mild, persuasive influence from above; hence, the words used by them are, *ανηχθη* and *ηγελο*. St. Mark, on the contrary, might suppose that he was excited or carried away by a strong impulse of the Divinity, which he describes by the term, *εκβαλλει*.

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